

NEIL SCHMID

The Material Culture of Exegesis and Liturgy and a Change in the Artistic Representations in Dunhuang Caves, ca. 700–1000

INTRODUCTION

The Mogao Caves 莫高窟 near Dunhuang 敦煌 embrace a variety of stylistic elements and iconography that reflect a thousand years, and more, of Buddhist trends and influences from both Central Asia and the heartland of China. But within that span, an important specific change took place from about the mid-eighth century (or High Tang era) to about the 1000s, with the advent of Xixia influence in Dunhuang. In style and content, the upper registers of the caves now contained large murals representing scriptures *jingbian* 經變 (or, *bianxiang* 變相: “transformation tableaux”), while screens (or, panels: *pingfeng* 屏風) depicting scenes from karmic and other narratives occupied the lower registers together with donor figures. (See figures 1 and 2, overleaf.) The centerpiece of many of the caves, that is, the western niches that contain statues of the Buddha, bodhisattvas, and disciples, changed dramatically in form as well. Instead of a rounded hollow (figures 3 and 4), the recesses now become a rectangular platform with either a gabled or flat roof and an interior of surrounding screens (figure 5). These niches were now relatively more lifelike, with frequent *trompe l’oeil* stylization: large wall-tableaux replicating hanging silk paintings with

I WOULD like to thank the following people in particular for their thoughts and comments on the multiple incarnations of this paper: Lauren Nemroff, Dorothy Wong, Robert Sharf, Mimi Yiengpruksawan, Nancy Steinhardt, Stephen Teiser, Angela Sheng, Kuo Liying, and two anonymous readers for *Asia Major*. My profound gratitude is to Victor Mair for ceaseless generosity in sharing his extensive knowledge and valuable time.

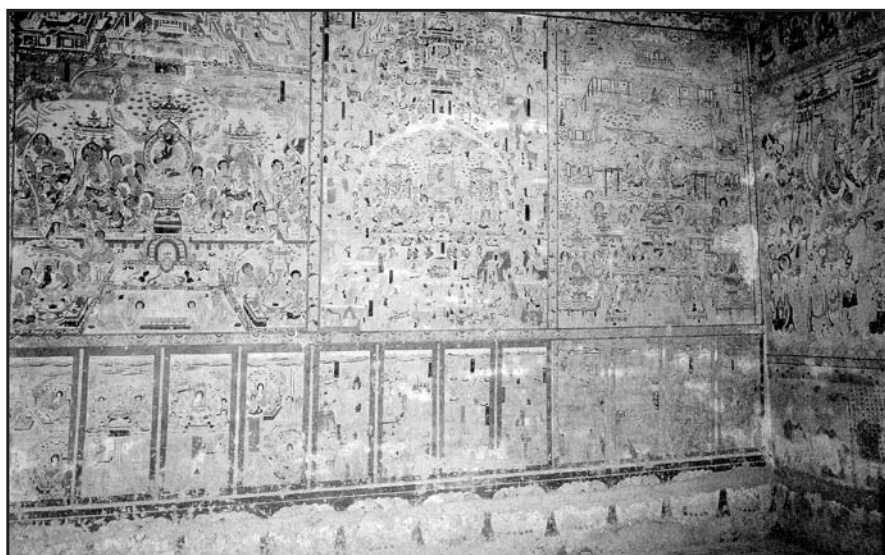
In order to make an argument about historic shifts in style at Dunhuang, I utilize the reference scheme developed by the Dunhuang Research Academy: early-Tang 618–704; high-Tang 705–80; mid-Tang 781–847; late-Tang 848–906; Five Dynasties 907–59; Song 960–1035; Western Xia (Xixia) 1036–1226.

brocade borders and temple paintings adorn the upper registers, while the bottom registers hold a succession of individual scenes framed as if they were winged screens, that is folding vertical screens. Fabrics and valances, scalloped openings for the mock platforms (figure 6), even hinges painted on the mock screens (figure 7) all add to the illusion of a room filled with usable objects. The earlier of the Mogao Caves lack such an elaborated set of conventions and frames that delineated particular elements constituting a pictorial space. From the mid-Tang period forward, the painted interiors present specific items carefully rendered with the proportions and details of real-life objects. As such, the depictions are not merely paintings but represent experiential and kinesthetically accurate fixtures found in ritual settings. Moreover, in contrast to previous caves with walls dominated by pictures or statues of buddhas expounding the Buddhist law 說法圖 (figures 3 and 8) the murals now contain *what* was expounded – scriptures – together with representations of the very objects that enabled instruction.¹

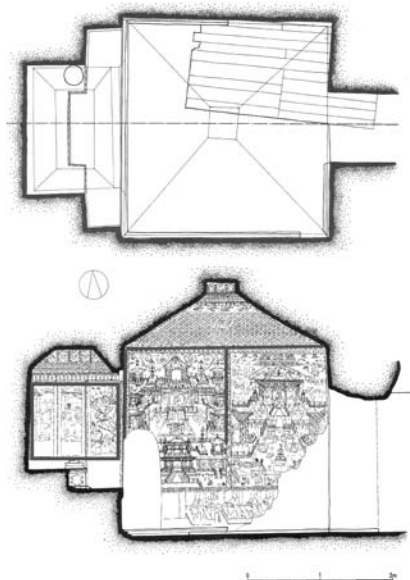
These transformation tableaux, screens, platforms, and fabrics serve to evoke a unified, functional space. Together the elements and their presentation institute a definitive change in the art of the Mogao Caves, remaining constant until the beginning of the Xixia period in the eleventh century. Such a dramatic and fundamental shift in the content and style of pictorial program would seem to imply changes at the ritual and conceptual levels that ultimately structured these spaces. Furthermore, the shift in artistic program served to create a ritual setting, one that foregrounded objects that were lifelike in proportion and detail. The realism, familiarity, and accessibility of these items in fact indexes their association with the living, an association asserted in the transformation of the accompanying painted donor-figures, which grew in size and prominence during the period.

How then does the aesthetic and conceptual transformation of the caves' interior space reflect changes in the beliefs and practices of the patrons themselves? Given the nature of these caves as religious structures created at great expenditure by the local population, the question is vital: the answer may tell us much about fundamental developments in medieval religious life and, moreover, about the specifics of what that life consisted of in ways meaningful to those who lived it. Remarkably,

¹ Cave 159 strikingly exemplifies this complete transformation of style with its highly delineated presentation of items – *zhang*, murals, and winged screens – within the pictorial program as discrete objects. See *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku* 1–5 中國石窟敦煌莫高窟 (1–5) (Beijing: 1999; hereafter, *DHMGK*) 4, pll. 75–93. Other caves that illustrate such changes by including a *zhang*-type platform, *bianxiang*, and screens of this distinct style are: nos. 113, 148 (high-Tang); nos. 197, 159, 361, 237 (mid-Tang); nos. 18, 107, 9, 192 (late-Tang).

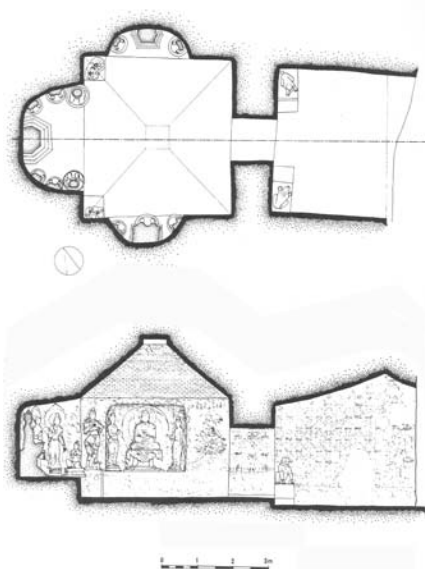


*Figure 1. Transformation Tableaux and Screens, Mogao Cave 231
North wall; mid-Tang (ca. 839). From DHSKQJ 22, pl. 8.*



*Figure 2. Plan and Elevation,
Mogao Cave 361*

Mid-Tang. Note shape of left-most niche with 3 screens (marked here by grey border), and the 2 tableaux marked in larger area at right. From DHMGK 4, p. 235.



*Figure 3. Plan and Elevation,
Mogao Cave 384*

High-Tang; before change in styles. Note rounded hollow areas in the bird's-eye view (top) and rounded corners shown in cut-away (bottom). From DHMGK 4, p. 233.

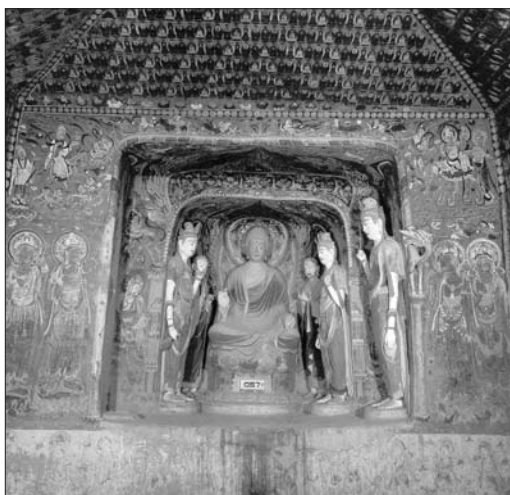


Figure 4. Western Niche, Mogao Cave 57

Early-Tang; before style change. Note the scooped-out, rounded hollow in which the sculpture sits. From DHMGK 3, pl. 8.

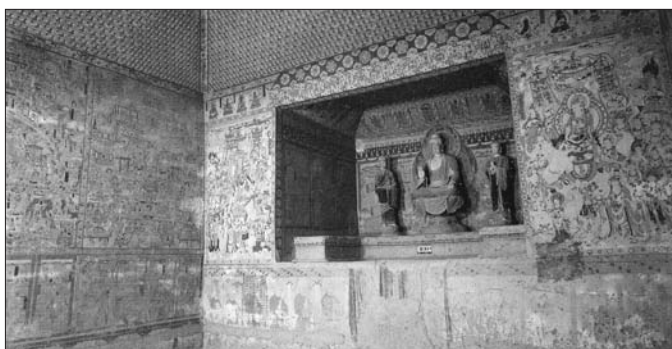


Figure 5. Western Niche as Zhang, Mogao Cave 231

Mid-Tang, ca. 839; post-style change. Note squared-off niche as Zhang. From DHSKYS 154, pl. 121.



Figure 6. Western Niche as Zhang, Mogao Cave 361

Mid-Tang. The light-colored scalloped openings shown on bottom horizontal tier in effect define the front six legs of the chuangzhang, or platform. From DHMGK 4, pl. 117.



Figure 7. Interior of Zhang, Mogao Cave 159

Mid-Tang; western niche. The two walls show winged screens and valances. Note the trompe l'oeil screen hinges: the vertical row of faint black dots, in the corner between statues. From DHMGK 4, pl. 77.

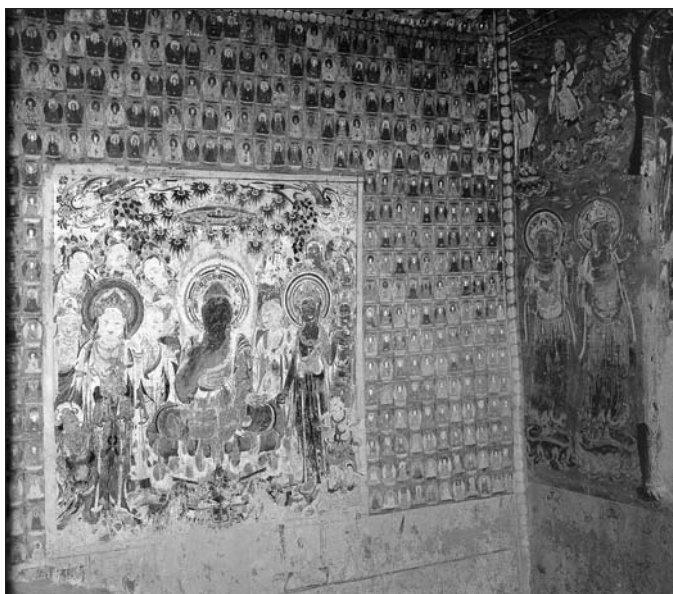


Figure 8. Preaching Buddha Scene, Mogao Cave 57
Early-Tang, prior to style change; north wall. From
DHSKQJ 22, pl. 64.

no Western or Asian scholar has examined the changes as an integrated phenomenon. Additionally, the in-depth and consistent use of a style depicting lifelike objects and the style's significance remain unstudied. The introduction of new artifacts into a ritual setting is significant; the participants now relate to the space, to each other, and to the divinity represented in new ways. The question of what went on these caves is often raised, and this transitional moment together with its set of features presents a critical opportunity to examine how different structural and aesthetic forms indicate altered ritual practices and new beliefs.

This article examines specific depicted objects – the western niche as a mock platform, the large painted murals as hanging silk paintings, and the faux winged screens – in order to establish how the caves were conceptualized in ritual terms. My finding is that the platform element, that is, the caves' western niche occupied by a statue of a Buddha, was in fact a replication of the literati *zhang* 帳 (*chuangzhang* 床帳), a tent-like structure mounted on a platform that was used from the fourth century BC onwards as a seat of authority and instruction. This object with its scholarly associations, notably of textual exegesis, marks the interior of the cave as a place of learning and rearticulates the Buddha as a classical literatus. The *zhang* as a teaching platform works together with

the format and scriptural content of the mural paintings to establish a programmatic correlation with materials and texts used in the then-current exegetical styles of sūtra lectures (*jiangjing* 講經), while the caves as a whole replicate the liturgical scene of sūtra lectures and of the lay or “popular lecture” (*sujiang* 俗講) that developed during the Tang and Five Dynasties periods.

These large-scale and private lectures on Buddhist scriptures were officiated by clergy and funded by donors for the wellbeing of family, community, and polity. They provided a fundamental means of transmitting Buddhist doctrine and functioned as an essential merit-making event. Furthermore, Dunhuang documents indicate that lectures were held as part of premortem (*yuxiu* 預修) and postmortem rituals for family members and for political figures, namely, the Seven Feasts 七七齋, or in some cases, the Feast of One Hundred Days 百日齋, during the liminal period immediately after death. In their creation of meritorious karmic bonds, or affinities (*jieyuan* 結緣), such ceremonies and their efficacies united all involved: clergy, donors, and dedicatees, as well as the devotional figure in the form of a painting or statue. In their ability to establish relations across time and space, these rituals became powerful tools in expediting a variety of socio-religious agendas. Understood as spaces reflecting lay-oriented rituals, the caves participated in the larger, vernacular changes in the medieval religious landscape in China in which transformations in ritual practice and beliefs rendered the divine more accessible to the general populace. Dunhuang caves provide examples of these developments in exceptionally vivid and concrete terms. But the caves also demonstrate their vernacularity, as seen in their uniqueness as local creations reflecting the needs and understandings of Buddhist life at Dunhuang, in its social complexity.

In what follows, I demonstrate that “family caves” (*jiaku* 家窟) from the Tang and Five Dynasties periods articulate in visual and spatial terms the socio-religious complexities embodied in the proselytizing ritual, while simultaneously reflecting changes generally in the religious landscape. Inside the caves, the ritual setting and objects of the liturgical event are represented through spatial configurations and *trompe l'oeil* painting. The *zhang*, tableaux, and screens are each explicitly and deftly framed as such with, respectively, delineated structures, brocade borders, and connected panels. In turn, they both frame and empower the reality of the event. By funding the construction of caves, the patrons and donors in fact funded the implementation of the implied ritual. As a liturgical setting, the cave established a space that united the living and the dead, the familial and socio-political, and the human

and divine through the collapse of time and space into a singular ritual event. However, here in the Mogao Caves the ritual is implemented virtually and permanently, with such ephemera as silk and wood – like the patrons themselves – now set timelessly in paint. By collapsing the momentary and eternal, the patrons create a site of everlasting merit-making for their relations and for themselves. In the discussion which follows, I examine the lifelike material objects – the *zhang*, murals, and screens – and their rich associations configured to the local context at Dunhuang, which together can be seen as grounding and rendering conceivable the immateriality of the ritual.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE ZHANG

The *zhang* usually depicted at Dunhuang have a lengthy tradition, with origins in pre-Han furnishings. During the Han period, *chuang* 床 (platform) and *zhang* (canopy, or tent) were considered such a fundamental and important part of day-to-day experience that the section of the Han-era lexicon *Explanation of Names* (*Shiming* 釋名) devoted to furnishings is entitled “Explanations of Platforms and Canopies” 釋床帳. The compendium, attributed to Liu Xi 劉熙 (fl. 200 AD), was created in order that “names corresponded to reality so that each was right and proper.”² A *zhang* is not simply any covering or tent-like structure but, according to *Shiming*, one that is used on a platform 施於床上也. The text then distinguishes a “smaller *zhang*, the shape of which is an inverted dipper 小帳曰斗形如覆斗也.” Portable platforms in early China were multi-purpose, “used for both daytime activities and sleeping 人所坐臥曰床,”³ and the term “bed” sometimes used to describe them is misleading.⁴ Archeological evidence indicates that testerbed platforms

² The text reads: 夫名之於實各有義類; *Shiming* 1A (sect. “Preface”); D. C. Lau, ed., *Concordances to the Shiming, Jijiupian* (*Shi ming zhu zi suo yin*) 釋名·急就篇 (釋名逐字索引) *Ji jiu pian zhu zi suo yin* 急就篇逐字索引), Chinese University of Hong Kong Institute of Chinese Studies, ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series, Classical Works 22–23 (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2002), p. 1. For an overview of the text, see Roy Andrew Miller, “Shih ming,” in Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, Early China Special Monograph Series 2 (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), pp. 424–28.

³ See *Shiming* 6.1 (Lau, *Concordances to the Shiming, Jijiupian*, p. 67): 人所坐臥曰床.

⁴ *Zhang* are to be distinguished from Ming and Qing canopy beds 架子床 and similar beds with a cane webbing 藤床. Although both derive from ancient and medieval canopied platforms 床帳, they lack the early ideological associations and were used exclusively indoors. With regard to the *zhang* and its symbolic uses, roughly analogous structures exist in the western Christian tradition, i.e., the early medieval *ciborium* and the Renaissance *baldachino*. Anneliese Bulling, “The Decoration of Some Mirrors of the Chou and Han Periods,” *Artibus Asiae* 18.1 (1955), pp. 20–45, discusses canopies and umbrellas (pp. 36–40) as symbols of sacred power and authority in the Warring States and Han periods.

were in use as early as the Warring States and constructed of wood and bronze joints, easily assembled and disassembled.⁵ The tomb of prince Liu Sheng 劉勝 (d. 113 BC) provides examples of fasteners and joints used to erect such a structure, allowing for the reconstruction of the framework (figure 9).⁶ These remains measure approximately 2.5 by 1.5 meters for the bottom planar area, 2 meters high, and were four-postered.⁷ Unfortunately no Han-era platforms on which the *zhang* would be placed are extant, although we do possess similar pieces from the Warring States period.⁸ Nonetheless, the configurations and proportions of both the platform and the canopy remained standard for the next 800 years.

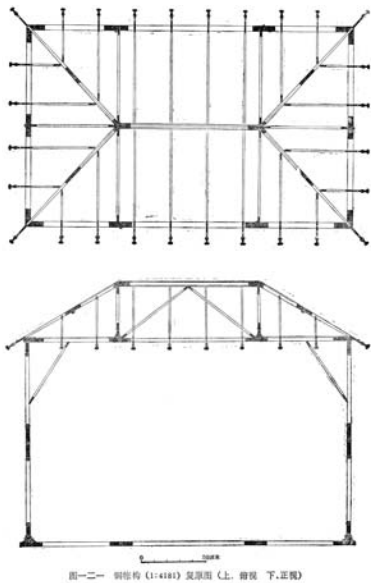


Figure 9. Reconstructed Zhang, Tomb 2, Mancheng

From Mancheng Hanmu faju baogu (cited n. 6) 2, pl. 121.

Along with the configuration, the symbolism and ceremonial function of the *zhang* also took shape during the Han. The object became associated with the eminent classical scholar Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166), renowned for his private academy and learned exegeses of the classics. In the *History of the Later Han*, Ma Rong's biography states that as a highly successful teacher drawing thousands of students, he would set up a canopied platform in crimson silk 施絳紗帳.⁹ The expression “to set up a *zhang* 設帳” became a common metonym for teaching. The language of that account is seen in other standard idioms us-

⁵ Yi Shui 易水, “Zhang he zhanggou, jiaju tanwang zhi er” 帳和帳勾家具談望之二, *WW* 1980.4, pp. 85–88.

⁶ Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo and Hebei sheng wenwu guanlichu 中國社會科學院考古研究所河北省文物管理處, *Mancheng Hanmu faju baogu* 滿城漢墓發掘報告 (Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1980) 1, pp. 160–78. See Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (Stanford: Stanford U.P. 1995), p. 133 (fig. 2.44b) for the way silk covered tents were situated within the tomb.

⁷ For illustrations of a Han *zhang* and its accoutrements, see Sun Ji 孫機, *Handai wuzhi wenhua ziliao tushuo* 漢代物質文化資料圖說 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1991), pl. 56.

⁸ Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 河南省文物研究所, *Xinyang chumu* 信陽楚墓 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), pl. 30.1.

⁹ *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (punct. Beijing Zhonghua edn.) 60A, p. 1972.

ing the term *zhang* related both to classical scholars and teaching: “Ma Rong’s *zhang* 馬融帳,” or simply 馬帳, meant a scholar’s study or place of instruction in classical texts;¹⁰ metonymical expressions include “crimson *zhang* 絳帳” and “crimson gauze 絳紗,” both of which came to mean “a teacher’s seat.” In continual use for the next thousand years, the expression “crimson *zhang*” also was an accepted term in medieval Buddhist discourse for this item of furniture, such that it merited an entry in Daocheng’s 道誠 (fl.1019) lexical compilation *Shishi yaolan* 釋氏要覽. In the section on proselytizing, “Expounding and Listening [to the Dharma]” 說聽篇, the entry, by way of definition, references the expression’s provenance – Ma Rong’s biography and that of the much-later woman scholar named Lady Song 宋氏 (mother of Wei Cheng 韋逞). In the annotation following however, Daoxuan attempts to make an ideological distinction, clarifying that this expression used with its historical associations is not exactly appropriate.¹¹

THE ZHANG-PLATFORM IN BUDDHIST ART

The earliest evidence for *zhang* in Buddhist contexts occurs in reliefs at Yungang 云岡 and Longmen 龍門 dating from the Northern Wei (386–535).¹² In keeping with the literati connotations and didactic functions of the *zhang* discussed above, the depiction of covered platforms at these sites appears in illustrations of the *Vimalakīrti sūtra* 維摩詰經.¹³ Indeed, outside of illustrating this particular scripture in pre-Tang art, the *zhang* is rarely used in early Chinese Buddhist painting or sculpture.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典, ed. Hanyu dacidian bianji weiyuan hui (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1986–1996) 12, p. 776A.

¹¹ It reads, s.v. “絳帳”: 絳赤色也。范曄後漢書云。馬融達生任性不拘儒者之節。常坐高堂施絳帳。前授生徒。後列女樂。或稱馬帳。又晉書宣文君宋氏。即韋逞母也。立講堂。隔絳紗幔授學徒。今釋子稱絳帳等。有所不宜。智者思之。 (Tno. 2127, vol. 54, p. 295A–B). Interestingly, when Xuanzang wrote to explain to the emperor his travels to India for scriptures and learning, he invoked Ma Rong as the paradigmatic teacher for whom people traveled great distances; see *Da Tang da ciansi sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳; Tno. 2053, vol. 50, p. 251C.

¹² According to Jin Weinuo 僅維諾, “Dunhuang bihua Weimo bian de fazhan” 敦煌壁畫維摩變得發展, *WW* 1959.2, p. 4, the earliest depictions of the *Vimalakīrti sūtra* are in Caves 1, 2, and 7 at Yungang. He Shizhe 賀世哲, “Dunhuang Mogao ku bihua zhong de Weimojie jingbian” 敦煌莫高窟壁畫中的維摩詰經變, *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 2 (1982), p. 63, cites a painting of Vimalakīrti (without Mañjuśrī) in Binglingsi 炳靈寺, Cave 169, as the earliest, dating from 420.

¹³ E.g., at Yungang, see Mizuno Seiichi and T. Nagahiro, *Unkō sekkutsu* 云岡石窟 (Kyoto: Kyōto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1952–55) 2, pl. 75B. Etienne Lamotte, *The Teaching of the Vimalakīrti* (*Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*), trans. Sara Boin (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1994), pp. xxvi–liii, provides an overview of *Vimalakīrti* translations into Chinese. For English translations of those, see *ibid.* and Burton Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra* (New York: Columbia U.P.), 2000.

¹⁴ Illustrations of the *Vimalakīrti* scripture specifically highlight the protagonist’s seat as a

Yet the appearance of the *zhang* in the context of the *Vimalakīrti sūtra* would easily follow from the scripture's portrayal of the socially successful Vimalakīrti as a "retired scholar 居士." The scripture resonated especially well among the élite of southern China during Eastern Jin (317–420), with the exchange between Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti echoing the scholarly depth and rigor of contemporaneous intellectual discourse known as "pure conversation 清談."¹⁵ Although now contested, scholars long held that that the first picture of Vimalakīrti emerged from the hand of the painter Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (344–ca. 406), known for, among other images, portraits of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove 竹林七賢.¹⁶ Originally painted as a mural in Wagan'si 瓦官寺 in Jiankang 建康, Gu Kaizhi's portrait of Vimalakīrti won praise for its masterful depiction of the protagonist.¹⁷ Of interest to us is that Gu's painting may have influenced Longmen illustrations of the *Vimalakīrti*, providing an additional set of stylistic and iconographical elements from the scholarly milieu of the south to those already present at the northwestern site. Whereas previous fourth- and fifth-century reliefs of Vimalakīrti at Yungang and Longmen typically place both him and Mañjuśrī either in trapezoidal arches based on Gandharan prototypes or Chinese dwellings, though in each case dressed in western attire,¹⁸ early sixth-century carvings and paintings, most clearly in Binyang 賓陽 Cave (503–524) at Longmen, demonstrate a southern influence, thought to

zhang, portraying it angled to full effect. Even when Vimalakīrti's *zhang* is depicted frontally and in limited space, an effort is made to show the platform. E.g., the illustration of the Zhang Danggui 張暉鬼 stele (559 AD) in Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of a Symbolic Form* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 2004), p. 136 (fig. 9.1). The placement of buddhas and bodhisattvas within canopied settings does occur during the Northern Dynasties, though rarely, if ever, on a platform *chuang* 床, and often with a curved or trapezoidal arch, i.e., illustrations of Guyang 古陽 Cave (Northern Wei) at Longmen. For illustrations, see Zhang Naizhu 張乃翥, *Longmen Fojiao zaoxiang* 龍門佛教造像, Fojiao meishu quanji 佛教美術全集 6 (Taibei: Yishujia chubanshe, 1998), pp. 44–47, 50–53, and the Zhai Man 翟蠻 Maitreya stele (520), Wong, *Chinese Steles*, p. 97 (fig. 6.5).

¹⁵ Richard B. Mather, "Vimalakīrti and Gentry Buddhism," *History of Religions* 8, 1968, pp. 60–73, and Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (rpt. with corrections, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 131–32, discuss the appeal of this sūtra to the southern gentry and its relation to "dark learning 玄學" and pure conversation.

¹⁶ Gu Kaizhi himself was adept at pure conversation (Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, p. 94). A. C. Soper, "Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China," *Artibus Asiae Supplementum* 19 (Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1959), discusses Gu Kaizhi's biography and works.

¹⁷ *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Huashi congshu Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe) 4, p. 68. For a translation, see William R. B. Acker and Yen-Yuan Chang, trans., *Some Tang and Pre-Tang Texts on Chinese Painting: Li Tai Ming Hua Ji, Chapters IV–X*, Sinica Leidensia S. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974) 2, p. 45.

¹⁸ Emma C. Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," *Artibus Asiae* 30.1 (1968), pp. 28–52.

be specifically that of Gu Kaizhi's masterpiece.¹⁹ In addition to the sophisticated lines and Han clothing characterizing these later depictions, the most prominent change is the on-going adoption of a *zhang* to frame Vimalakīrti. In contrast, Mañjuśrī is placed on a lotus seat often under a parasol or sometimes in a tiled-roof building, thereby foregrounding the symbolic differences between the two debaters.²⁰ Each holds his representative symbol: Mañjuśrī a *ruyi* 如意 (scepter indicating authority and eloquence in debate) and Vimalakīrti a deer-tailed fan (*zhuwei* 麈尾), both favored accoutrements of literati and *qingtan* adepts.²¹ But in one sense, these objects were optional – the illustrators of the scripture were not constrained in their portrayal of the characters or their setting; the two relevant extant Chinese translations of the scripture provide no detailed description of either.²² There is, however, one item of importance remaining after Vimalakīrti has emptied the house of all furnishings in expectation of the arrival of Mañjuśrī and his entourage: his couch 床.²³ Like both Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti, this crucial piece of furniture is not described (the word used in each text is simply “bed, or platform 床”).²⁴ Nonetheless, the iconographical significance of this and the deer-tail fan as defining features of Vimalakīrti frame him squarely within the Chinese literati tradition.

Other pre-Tang representations of Vimalakīrti seated in a *zhang* are found carved on steles and include additional elements further ex-

¹⁹ Ibid.; see also A. C. Soper, “South Chinese Influence on the Buddhist Art of the Six Dynasties Period,” *BMFEA* 32 (1960), p. 78, who cites the fall of Southern Qi and movement of artisans north as instrumental in the change of styles in Binyang cave. For illustrations, *ibid.*, pp. 43, 67.

²⁰ Zhang, *Longmen Fojiao zaoxiang*, pp. 80 (top left corner), 82, 87.

²¹ John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2003), pp. 138–52, states that the origins of the *ruyi* scepter are in depictions of debate scenes with Vimalakīrti, and that it later became a defining iconographical feature of Mañjuśrī, independent of those representations. *Shishi yaolan*, containing entries for both items (located immediately adjacent to each other; *T* no. 2127, vol 54, p. 279B), notes that “today’s lecturers wield it 今講者持.”

²² *Foshuo Weimojie jing* 佛說維摩詰經 (trans. Zhiqian, ca. 225; *T* no. 474, vol. 14, pp. 521A5–21A10, and *Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經 (trans. Kumarajīva, 406; *T* no. 475, vol. 14, pp. 539A19–39A25).

²³ *T* no. 474, vol. 14, p. 5525B, and *T* no. 475, vol. 14, p. 544B.

²⁴ Lamotte, *Teaching of the Vimalakīrti*, p. 116, gives the Skt. *mañcaka* “bed,” “couch.” For a discussion of *mañca* “platform” in early Buddhist art, see Karel R. Van Kooij, “Remarks on Festivals and Altars in Early Buddhist Art,” in K. R. van Kooij and H. van der Veere, eds., *Function and Meaning in Buddhist Art* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), p. 38. Laura G. Heyrman, “The Meeting of Vimalakīrti and Manjusri: Chinese Innovation in Buddhist Iconography,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Minnesota, 1994), pp. 137–51, examines the placement and seating of both Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti in a wide range of depictions. However, she does not pursue the Chinese predecessors to these seats, nor does she elaborate the ideological implications of the artists’ choices.

tending the Buddhist adept's connection with Chinese literati. Most importantly folding or winged screens *pingfeng* now surround Vimalakīrti on three sides, as in a stele from Henan dated 527.²⁵ In use since the Warring States period, screens, winged and singular, were instrumental in defining both space and authority.²⁶ Their inclusion in images of Vimalakīrti elaborates the associations with the literati and court, and becomes a standard, henceforth iconographic, feature. *Zhang* were a standard item of the courtly world as exemplified by Shen Yue's 沈約 (441–513) poem "Singing of the Zhang" ("Yong zhang shi" 詠帳詩).²⁷

Zhang at Dunhuang: Vimalakīrti

Depictions of scenarios from the *Vimalakīrti sūtra* appear at Dunhuang in the Mogao Caves beginning in the Sui dynasty (581–617) era and remain prominent in the pictorial program there for the next 500 years. A total of sixty-seven illustrations of the scripture exist, ranging from small pictures in the recesses of niches to large-scale transformation tableaux dominating entire walls.²⁸ Equally popular were copies of the scripture itself: over 800 different manuscripts of differing portions and editions of the text, in addition to ancillary texts such as poems and commentaries, were discovered in the Library Cave (cave 17).²⁹ Sui depictions of the debate, mentioned above, place both Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti in Chinese buildings with tiled roofs,³⁰ or in one unique case, simply standing.³¹

²⁵ See Osvald Siren, *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century* (London: Benn, 1925) 2, pl. 152 (Henan stele dated 527 in the ISMEO Collection). Other e.g.: 529 stele (Matsubara Saburo 松原三郎, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shi kenkyū* 中國佛教彫刻史研究 [Tokyo: Yoshikawa kobunkan, 1969], p. 101, fig. 79).

²⁶ Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (Chicago: Chicago U.P., 1996).

²⁷ Lu Qinli 遼欽立, ed., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbei chao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p. 1657. This poem belongs to the category of "poems on objects" (*yongwu shi* 詠物詩), a subgenre of palace style poetry (*gongti shi* 宮體詩). They typically describe the objects and artificiality of the courtly world; see Richard B. Mather, *The Poet Shen Yue (441–513): The Reticent Marquis* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1988), pp. 67–72, and Fusheng Wu, *Poetics of Decadence: Chinese Poetry of the Southern Dynasties and Late Tang Periods* (Albany: SUNY P., 1998), pp. 68–73.

²⁸ He Shizhe 賀世哲, "Dunhuang Mogao ku bihua zhong de Weimojie jingbian" 敦煌莫高窟壁畫中的維摩詰經變, *Dunhuang yanjiu* 2 (1982), pp. 62–87; Ning Qiang, *Art, Politics, and Religion in Medieval China: The Dunhuang Caves of the Zhai Family* (Honolulu: Hawaii U.P., 2004), pp. 139–40. For an overview of the *Vimalakīrti sūtra* and its depiction at Dunhuang, see Dunhuang Research Academy 敦煌研究院, eds., *Dunhuang shiku quanji* 敦煌石窟全集 (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1999–; hereafter, *DHSKQJ*) 7, pp. 182–249.

²⁹ Dunhuang Research Academy, eds., *Dunhuang yishu zongmu suoyin xinbian* 敦煌遺書總目索引新編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), pp. 134–38 provides a list.

³⁰ For a photo of cave 433, see *DHMGK* 2, p. 168, pl. 69 (cave 419); pl. 78 (cave 314); pll. 135, 136 (cave 380); pll. 188, 189.

³¹ Cave 276, *DHMGK* 2, pll. 122, 123.

Cave 220 built by the Zhai 翟 family in 642 marks a radical shift in style and content in regard to the *Vimalakīrti sūtra*, establishing the paradigm to be followed for the remainder of its depiction at Mogao. The Zhai family cave as a whole is unique in that it is the earliest “family cave” constructed at Dunhuang and is the first to illustrate a single sūtra per wall using the format of the sūtra tableaux *jingbian*, a configuration that, expanded, would dominate the artistic programs of nearly all Tang, Five Dynasties, and Song caves to follow.³² It is highly significant that this format first occurs in a family cave, a point that I elaborate, below. In Cave 220 the *Vimalakīrti sūtra* occupies the east wall, Mañjuśrī on the north side of the entrance and Vimalakīrti to the south. The bodhisattva is painted on a lotus throne while Vimalakīrti sits, deer-tail fan in hand, in a richly decorated *zhang*, the canopy bordered with fabrics, surrounded by screens placed on a scalloped platform.³³ All these features are a continuation of iconographical elements discussed above.³⁴ What is added to the sūtra illustration are large entourages for both characters, which most significantly includes an anachronistic portrayal of emperor Taizong, his officials and ministers below Mañjuśrī, while non-Chinese dignitaries stand below Vimalakīrti. Ning Qiang discusses the particular figures and their representation of the Tang political landscape.³⁵ Inclusion in the mural is a demonstrative gesture signifying the dominance of the Tang empire in the Dunhuang area and the Zhai’s allegiance to the emperor and court. Of interest to our discussion of the *zhang* and its later development at Mogao is the ideological implications generated by the overall configuration of the two debaters, the characteristics of their followers, and the relationships of power between them.

In their discussion of the Tang emperor, court officials, and the non-Chinese kings and dignitaries illustrating the *Vimalakīrti*, scholars fail to examine the significance of the placement of these figures in relation

³² Ning, *Art, Politics, and Religion*, examines the religious and socio-political aspects of the cave in depth. Cave 335 (ca. 686) may be, according to Roderick Whitfield (personal communication), the earliest depiction of Gu Kaizhi’s painting at Dunhuang. It also depicts the same iconographical features found in Cave 220’s version. For images of cave 335, see *DHMGK* 3, pl. 61, and *Zhongguo meishu quanji* 中國美術全集 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988) 2, pl. 40; *DHSKQJ* 9, p. 21 (line drawing); close-up, p. 30 (pl. 14).

³³ See *DHMGK* 3, pll. 33, 34.

³⁴ These elements appear not only in murals but also in late-Tang and Five Dynasties sketches of the scene; e.g., Stein painting 76; Sarah Fraser, *Performing the Visual: Making Wall Paintings in China and Central Asia, 618–960* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2004), pp. 120, 122, for illustrations.

³⁵ Ning (*Art, Politics, and Religion*, pp. 57–61) also suggests that these depictions of specific individuals, including Taizong, are based on particular paintings by Yan Liben 閻立本 (ca. 600–673).

to the two debaters who provide the focal points for the tableaux. Cave 220's mural provides the paradigm followed for all other large illustrations of the sūtra and maintains this standard configuration (figure 10, overleaf). Why is the Chinese emperor consistently placed immediately below Mañjuśrī and, opposite him, non-Chinese people positioned beneath Vimalakīrti, the hero, if you will, of the scripture? These are not random choices; all murals foreground these figures, highlighting their proximate relations to the two main characters and, moreover, this specific pictorial arrangement continues unchanged.

One possible way of understanding the scenario and its constituent parts is to realize the full cultural significance of the *zhang* as a marker of Chinese (as opposed to specifically Buddhist) authority and learning, and hence as a marker of ethnicity and power. Thus, power flowing metaphorically top-down necessitates that non-Chinese stand under the *zhang*, subject to its authority.³⁶ Likewise, in their sacrality both the emperor and Mañjuśrī side together, in effect obliging the emperor to support the religion and to be, by extension, subject to it. It would make no sense to place the emperor below or subject to a symbol of Chinese authority, and he never appears in this position below Vimalakīrti. Buddhism worked as an ethnic unifier and clearly the inclusion of foreigners (demonstrably from the west, or specifically Tibet) in the Vimalakīrti tableaux was meant to imply this.³⁷ Their gaze is respectfully focused upwards to Mañjuśrī. Conversely, as an audience, the emperor and his retinue look toward Vimalakīrti positioned in the *zhang*, a seat of learning which, as we will see, could also be occupied by the clergy.

Zhang at Dunhuang: The Magic Competition

Another well-known narrative depicted at Dunhuang, the match between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa, "The Magic Competition," also demonstrates the same economy of symbolism found in the Vimalakīrti murals involving authority, learning, and ethnicity centered around the *zhang*, although to a very different end.³⁸ The story concerns the

³⁶ This authority is simultaneously both scholarly and moral. In his discussion of monks and Chinese scholarly ideals, Kieschnick (*Impact of Buddhism*, pp. 112–13) notes that "the scholar-official defined himself in opposition not to the hermit, but to the barbarian, someone either ignorant of the proper rites or *morally incapable of putting them into effect*" [my emphasis].

³⁷ For Buddhism as helping to unify the Shazhou region, see Yang Jidong, "Zhang Yichao and Dunhuang in the 9th Century," *Journal of Asian History* 32.2 (1998), pp. 97–144.

³⁸ Fourteen paintings of this story exist at Dunhuang dating from the early Tang to the Song: caves 335, 9, 85, 196, 6, 72, 98, 103, 53, 146, 342, 25, 55, 454. For an overview of depictions of the Magic Competition at Dunhuang, see *DHSKQJ* 9, pp. 12–78.

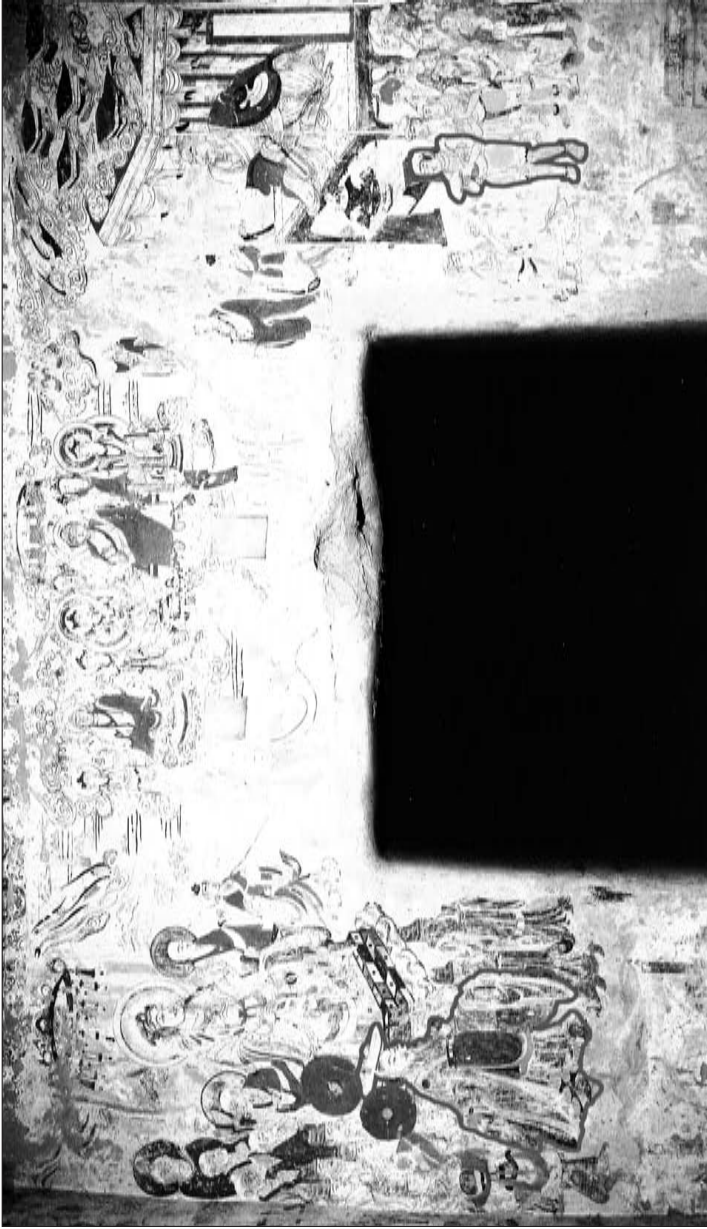


Figure 10. *Vimalakīrti Tableau, Mogao Cave 103*
High Tang; west wall. From DHSKQJ 7, pl. 205. The configuration, symbolism, and power of the mural in cave 103 typify depictions of the Vimalakīrti sutra from this period. In the lower left stands the Chinese emperor (outlined) and his entourage, below and subject to the authority of Mañjuśrī and Buddhism. Oppositionally, in the lower right stands the Tibetan king (outlined) and his followers, positioned beneath and subject to Vimalakīrti seated within the zhang, symbolizing traditions of Chinese authority and scholarship.

doctrinal contest of magical strength between Śāriputra, a disciple of the Buddha, and Raudrākṣa, a heterodox (*waidao* 外道) teacher.³⁹ The struggle occurs after Śāriputra's attempt to purchase land for a monastery is challenged by six heretical masters who fear a loss of followers and power. The chief of the six masters, Raudrākṣa, then engages in a match with Śāriputra, both for the land and for the King of Śrāvastī's religious allegiance, who will convert to the victor's faith. Six battles then follow, each won by Śāriputra: a jeweled mountain destroyed by vajra power; a bull devoured by a lion; a lake consumed by an elephant; a dragon vanquished by a mythical bird; evil demons destroyed by Vaiśravaṇa; and finally a massive tree blown over by a gale.

As in the Vimalakīrti sūtra tableaux, the *zhang* ("jeweled *zhang*": *baozhang* 寶帳) is a prominent and consistent feature of the Magic Competition – appearing in each version.⁴⁰ The contest between the two is framed oppositionally as in the previously discussed sūtra tableaux, yet, in contrast to the hero Vimalakīrti, it is Raudrākṣa who occupies the *zhang*.⁴¹ Clearly the seat bears the same symbolism as in the Vimalakīrti *bianxiang*, that of authority and learning. The significance of this is made all the more explicit as the *zhang* is forever depicted in the moment of its destruction (figure 11, over): on the side of immorality now, it should not and cannot bear the heretical master. Tellingly, the force which destroys it is Śāriputra's "doctrinal power 道力."⁴² The dynamism of the scene is impressive, with Raudrākṣa and his minions grimacing while they desperately – and quite comically – try to hold up the structure.⁴³ In contrast to the chaos of the heretic masters and their followers, the Buddhists in figure 12 sit serenely unfazed by the struggle. Their calm

³⁹ For a translation of the "Transformation Text on the Subjugation of Demons" ("Xiang mo bianwen" 降魔變文), see Victor Mair, *Tun-huang Popular Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983), pp. 31–84. Mair also provides an overview (*T'ang Transformation Texts: A Study of the Buddhist Contribution to the Rise of Vernacular Fiction and Drama in China*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Ser. 28 [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1989], pp. 18–19) of the story within the context of other *bianwen* narratives.

⁴⁰ Huang Zheng and Zhang Yongquan, eds., *Dunhuang bianwen ji jiaozhu* 敦煌變文集校註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997; hereafter, *DHBWJJZ*), p. 563.21. Śāriputra in contrast sits simply on a "jeweled seat" *baozuo* 寶座 (e.g., *ibid.*, p. 563.21 and 565.19). S.4257v (edited in *Dunhuang yishu zongmu suoyin xinbian*, pp. 130–31) provides a short account of the Magic Competition in what appears to be a collection of cartouche phrases from a painting. Here Raudrākṣa is described as situated in a *zhang* 帳 and *wozhang* 幄帳 "tent."

⁴¹ One exception is the early illustration in Cave 335, where both figures are seated on *zhang*. Note however that Raudrākṣa's tented platform is still depicted at its moment of destruction; see *DHMGK* 7, pl. 10.

⁴² *DHBWJJZ*, p. 566.21.

⁴³ This is described in *DHBWJJZ*, pp. 566.20–567.3, and translated in Mair, *Tun-huang Popular Narratives*, p. 83.



*Figure 11. Magic Competition: Destruction of Raudrākṣa's Zhang, Mogao Cave 196
Late-Tang; east wall. From ZGMSQJ 15, pl. 152.*

is also a mark of their ethnicity: in the various tableaux, Śāriputra and the surrounding Buddhists typically possess relatively more Chinese features, while Raudrākṣa and his underlings exhibit the exaggerated features of foreigners, made all the more garish by their emotionality.⁴⁴ The Chinese are in control; the barbarians are clearly not.

Neither the Vimalakīrti scripture nor the Magic Competition texts gives particular weight to or describes in detail the seats that frame and situate the major characters. However, in both these narratives artists chose moments where the *zhang* plays a signifying role. Additionally, the *zhang* functions as a configuring aesthetic element in the overall structure of each mural, elaborately painted and anchoring one side. The explicit use of



Figure 12. Magic Competition: Śāriputra on Lotus Throne, Mogao Cave 196

Late-T'ang; east wall. From ZGMSQJ 15, pl. 152.

this specific type of seating and its role in arranging figures of power, of ethnicity, and of learning convey layers of meaning not contained in either text, but which are of crucial significance given the socio-political circumstances of Dunhuang in the medieval period.

⁴⁴ See also the *parinirvāṇa* scene in Cave 158, where the overtly non-Chinese demonstrate their grief through excessively emotional gestures such as cutting off ears and noses, self-stabbing; *DHMGK* 4, pls. 64, 65.

The Niche as Zhang at Dunhuang

The most striking incorporation of the *zhang* into the artistic program at Dunhuang is its full instantiation as a life-sized, three-dimensional object: it becomes the western niche in the mid-Tang (781–847) caves. Prior to that time, caves were typified by niches that continued the arrangements and styles dating from the Northern Zhou (557–580).⁴⁵ These were rounded in their depth, often two-stepped, contained stucco sculptures, and were painted either with additional figures behind the sculptures or with the mandorla and/or nimbus of the main Buddha or bodhisattva statue. A border, or line, of Sassanian roundels defined the outer perimeter of the niche, while the front and exterior area below remained undefined in architectural or structural terms (figure 4). In mid-Tang, with the conquest of the general Shazhou region by the Tibetans, niches changed clearly so as to replicate *zhang*. The space becomes angular and well-defined, appearing stage-like (figures 5 and 6), while the arched exterior of Central Asian influence is rejected.

All the features of this new style of niche are the elements found in painted *zhang*, as discussed, above: the structure is a canopy, either gabled or inverted-dipper shaped (the distinction serving simply to define the types of *zhang* set forth in *Shiming*). The ceiling of the niche is sectioned into panels replicating the beams of the frame that typically supported the fabric of a canopy. Between the beams are “auspicious images 瑞像,” in this context being representations of Buddhist images, or statues.⁴⁶ The platform is surrounded on three sides by winged screens, while above these is a *trompe l’oeil* fabric border (figure 7). The artisans also took pains to create the illusion that it sits on a scalloped platform (figure 6).

⁴⁵ For a typology Dunhuang cave architecture, see Xiao Mo 肖默, “Dunhuang Mogaoku de dongku xingzhi” 敦煌莫高窟的洞窟型制, *DHMGK* 2, pp. 187–99.

⁴⁶ “Buddhist icons at Dunhuang are divided into two groups of images with different ontological status, one group directly referring to divinities – and so are able to receive the worshiper’s homage – and the other group referring to the ‘images’ of divinities. The former is a model; the latter, the representation” (Wu Hung, “Rethinking Liu Sahe: The Creation of a Buddhist Saint and the Invention of a ‘Miraculous Image,’” *Orientalism* 27.10 [November 1996], p. 40). These are images of famous icons from India, Central Asia, and China, identified as such by an adjacent cartouche. It would make sense that here, placed inside the ceiling of the niche, they would be unable to receive the adherent’s worship, though they would nonetheless retain powers, including those of association and place. For illustrations of *ruixiang* within niches, see *DHMGK* 4, pll. 99, 104, 106, 108, 109. *Ruixiang* disappear from Song-era niches (e.g., Cave 246, in Mission Paul Pelliot, *Documents archéologiques*, ed. Louis Hambis, vol. 11, *Grottes de Touen-Houang: Carnets de notes de Paul Pelliot: Inscriptions et peintures murales*, Documents conservés au Musée Guimet et à la Bibliothèque nationale [Paris: Centre de recherche sur l’Asie centrale et la Haute Asie, 1980–1992], pt. 3, pl. 177). This disappearance is no doubt tied to geo-political changes and their effects: the conquest of Khotan in 1006 by

In addition to the clear visual and material indications that niches from this period were reproductions of the scholarly canopied platform, we possess contemporaneous textual records that unequivocally refer to them as “*zhang*.” In a draft for the Yin Chushi stele 陰處士碑 as preserved in P.4640 (dated 839), the document records the refurbishing of Cave 231, speaking of it as having a “niche containing a plain statue of Śākyamuni with śrāvaka bodhisattvas, and the like, for a total of seven figures, while on the two sides of the entrance to the *zhang* 帳門 are paintings of Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, and attendants.”⁴⁷ This passage describes a typical artistic program for the middle Tang – a configuration of a *zhang*-type niche with Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra on either side, and the remainder of the cave filled with sūtra tableaux (*jingbian*). It was the standard format for the caves.⁴⁸

As discussed in the previous section, the *zhang* element was employed highly selectively in Dunhuang art, appearing only in the sūtra tableaux of Vimalakīrti and the Magic Competition. As late as 1019, the date of Daocheng’s 道誠 *Shishi yaolan*, the seat continued to be strongly associated with Confucian learning.

In sum, the adoption of the *zhang* by the Chinese patrons of newly-created family caves and its evolution as the basic form of the niche, where Buddha statues were placed, is striking. It is possible that the shift was, in part, a gesture of cultural and ethnic solidarity with the heartland of China,⁴⁹ given the symbolism of authority, learning, and ethnicity, on one hand, and the Tibetan occupation, on the other. Furthermore, by inscribing the Buddha firmly into the cultural matrix of the Chinese scholar-official, his status as a foreigner was diminished, and the differentiation from Chinese scholars lessened.⁵⁰ Buddhism also flourished during this period: 66 caves were completed or newly built, 19 monasteries were active, while clerical exchanges continued

the Karakhanids and the decrease of Khotan’s religious and political importance, together with the greatly decreased interaction with the locales associated with the images.

⁴⁷ The text is: 龕內素釋迦牟尼像並聲聞菩薩神等共七軀帳門兩面畫文殊普賢並侍從 (P.4640; “Dafan gu Dunhuangjun Mogao ku Yin chushi gongxiu gongdeji” 大蕃故敦煌郡莫高窟陰處士公修功德記 (“The Account of Merit Gained by Yin for Building at the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang Prefecture under the Great Tibetan Rule”).

⁴⁸ *DHMGK* 4, pl. 75, provides a clear illustration of this pictorial format with Cave 159.

⁴⁹ Duan Wenjie 段文傑, *Dunhuang yishu lunwen ji* 段文傑, 敦煌藝術論文集 (Lanzhou : Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1994), p. 192, notes that temples of this period took the names of those in the heartland and that the monastic structures closely resembled those of the Central Plain.

⁵⁰ The attempt by the Tibetans to impose their rule on Dunhuang was not simply administrative; the residents of the Dunhuang area were forced to adopt the dress and social decorum of the Tibetans, and were sometimes marked as slaves. Text in P.4638 (ed. Zheng Binglin 鄭

with Chang'an.⁵¹ The adoption of the *zhang* was further indication of the confidence and self-possession experienced by Buddhists during the eighth century, as China became the “central Buddhist realm” of East Asia.⁵² More significantly, however, the specific cooptation of this “seat” of power and ethnicity to represent the primary niche of mid- and late-Tang caves at Dunhuang was also motivated by the platform’s contemporaneous use in the ritual practice of Buddhist exegesis itself – the sūtra lecture (*jiangjing*). We turn now to this important subject.

EXEGESIS: SHUOFA, SUJIANG, AND JIANGJING

The performance of exegesis 講經 took place within the wider context of the propagation of the Buddhist law (*shuofa* 說法), which itself was embedded in an economy involving material and spiritual merit. The first *pāramitā* of charity (*shi* 施; Skt.: *dāna*) consists of two kinds, the gift of material goods (*caishi* 財施; *āmiṣadāna*) and the gift of the Dharma (law) (*fashi* 法施, or *fabushi* 法佈施; *dharmadāna*).⁵³ These were in turn differentiated by those who performed the acts: “laity should practice material offerings, monks should practice offering the Dharma” 在家人應行財施出家人應行法施.⁵⁴ To expound the Dharma (*shuofa*; *dharmadeśana*) is considered the best of all gifts,⁵⁵ and here the laity was effective in its provision of money, sūtras, paintings, and so on, thus enabling the clergy to expound the teachings.

炳林, *Dunhuang beimingzan jishi* 敦煌碑銘讚集釋 [Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992], pp. 238–41) details the Tibetan dress, hairstyles, and mark required of the Chinese. For an overview of the history of the Tibetan occupation, see Yamaguchi Zuihō 山口瑞鳳, “Toban shippai jidai” 吐蕃失敗時代, in Enoki Kazuo, ed., *Tonkō kōza* 敦煌講座, vol. 2 of *Tonkō no rekishi* 敦煌の歴史 (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1980), pp. 195–232.

⁵¹ *Tang Huiyao* 唐會要 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1991) 97, p. 244.

⁵² Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 2003), pp. 55–101.

⁵³ On this distinction, see Lamotte, *Teaching of the Vimalakīrti*, p. 693, n. 1 (see *Dazhi dulun* 大智度論, *T*no. 1509, vol. 25, p. 305c), and Louis de La Vallée Poussin, trans., *L’Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu* [1923–31; Brussels: Institute Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1971] 3, p. 251, n. 2. *Dharmadāna* is defined in Etienne Lamotte, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra)* (Louvain: Publications de l’Institut orientaliste de Louvain, 1981), pp. 692–700.

⁵⁴ *Shishi yaolan* 釋氏要覽 (*T*no. 54, vol. 2127, p. 276b). Although *Shishi yaolan* cites 大智度論 for this passage, it is in fact taken from *Sarvastivādinayavibhāsa* 薩婆多毘尼毘婆沙 (*T*no. 1440, vol. 23, p. 534b).

⁵⁵ “Dhammapada” (O. von Hinuber and K. R. Norman, eds., *Dhammapada* [London: Pāli Text Society, 1994], v.354. “The superiority of giving the Dharma 法施爲勝” recurs frequently in Buddhist scriptures, e.g., 大智度論 (*T*no. 1509, vol. 25, p. 144c).

Sūtra Lectures: Jiangjing wen and yuanqi

Large-scale propagation of the Dharma in medieval China took the form of the popular lecture. As multi-day liturgical rituals, they typically explicated one section or chapter of the sūtra over the entire length of the event; and an event could last for days or even weeks. These liturgies held for the benefit of both clergy and laity, and would be sponsored by individuals or lay societies.⁵⁶ Two Dunhuang manuscripts, P.3849 and S.4417,⁵⁷ provide detailed sequences of the steps necessary to perform a popular lecture, which is structured around a set of texts: 1. an introduction of Brahmanic hymns 梵讚 and a seat-settling text 押座文; 2. the exegetical text (*jiangjing wen* 講經文);⁵⁸ and 3. eulogies to the Buddha 佛讚, vows 發願文, texts for the transfer of merit for the well-being of others 回向文, and a text for dispersing the crowd 解講.⁵⁹ The exegesis of a scripture, such as the *Lotus sūtra* or *Amitabha sūtra* (see below for discussion of the sūtras used in *jiangjing wen*) engaged two performers, an assistant lecturer (*dujiang* 都講) who chanted several lines from a sūtra, and the dharma master (*fashi* 法師) who then elaborated, first in prose and then in verse. This was followed by the introductory formula “please [let’s] sing 唱將來,” requesting that the next passage from the sūtra be chanted. The assistant lecturer had an additional function of asking questions 難, or allowing members of the audience 賓 to pose questions, to which the dharma master would

⁵⁶ Popular lectures have been discussed by scholars; see an introduction in Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1972), pp. 240–55; also Luo Zongtao 羅宗濤, *Dunhuang jiangjing bianwen yanjiu* 敦煌講經變文研究 (Taipei: Wen shi zhe chubanshe, 1972), pp. 872–978; Sawada Mizuho, “Shina Bukkyō shōdō bungaku no seisei” 支那佛教唱導文學の生成, in his *Bukkyō to Chūgoku bungaku* 佛教と中國文化 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1975); Sun Kaidi 孫楷第, “Tangdai sujiang guifan yu qi ben zhi tcai” 唐代俗講規範與其本之體裁, in Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 and Bai Huawen 白化文, eds., *Dunhuang bianwen lunwen lu* 敦煌變文論文錄 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1982), pp. 71–129; Zhou Yiliang 周一良, “Du Tangdai sujiang kao” 讀唐代俗講考, in Zhou and Bai, *ibid.*, pp. 157–64; Xiang Da 向達, *Tangdai Chang'an yu xiyu wenming* 唐代長安與西域文明 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian chubanshe, 1957), pp. 294–336; and Qu Jinliang 曲金良, *Dunhuang Fojiao wenxue yanjiu* 敦煌佛教文學研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1996), pp. 20–60. I discuss lay lectures in detail in a book in preparation, working title “Buddhist Proselytization in Medieval China.” The earliest date for a popular lecture is 629 (*Xugaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳; T no. 2060, vol. 50, p. 602c) and the latest is mid-13th c. (*Fozu tong ji* 佛祖統紀; T no. 2035, vol. 49, p. 353b). Note that the first instance is within about a dozen years of the creation of Cave 220, the first family cave and the first to feature a *jingbian* occupying a single wall.

⁵⁷ For a translation and analysis of these texts, see Neil Schmid “*Yuanqi* 緣起: Medieval Buddhist Narratives from Dunhuang,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Pennsylvania, 2002), pp. 144–46.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the relationship between *jiangjing wen* as exegetical texts and more formal Buddhist commentaries *shu* 疏, see Hirano Kenshō 平野顯昭, *Tangdai wenxue yu Fojiao* 唐代文學與佛教 (trans. of *Tōdai bungaku to Bukkyō no kenkyū* 唐代文學と佛教の研究), Zhang Tongsheng 張桐生, trans. (Taipei: Huayu chubanshe, 1986), pp. 214–40.

⁵⁹ In the Song compendium *Sifenlu xingshichao zichiji* 四分律行事鈔資持記, by Huimen 慧門 (T no. 40, vol. 1805, p. 404b) we see a similar though abbreviated sequence.

answer 通. As described in *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳),⁶⁰ and *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳),⁶¹ debates on doctrine could become heated, and thus engaging from the viewpoint of the audience.⁶²

A close analysis of Buddhist manuscripts from Dunhuang indicates that another genre, “[stories on] karmic conditions, or circumstances” (*yuanqi* 緣起, or *yinyuan* 因緣), was used in conjunction with, or as a replacement for, sūtra lecture texts. This genre is an elaboration both in content and in style of *avadāna* narratives found in canonical collections such as the *Śatāvadhāna sūtra* (*Baiyuan jing* 百緣經), *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish* (*Xianyu jing* 賢愚經), and *Samyuktaratnapitaka sūtra* (*Zabaozang jing* 雜寶藏經). The *yuanqi* genre, however, broadens the scope of *avadānas*, which are typically stories of former lives of people and beings other than the Buddha – stories of the Buddha’s former lives being known as *jātakas* – to include those of the Buddha and, notably, episodes from the life of the historical Buddha.⁶³ Several textual characteristics distinguish a set of narratives as belonging this genre,⁶⁴ and other features provide clear indications that texts in this genre were employed as core texts of popular lectures.⁶⁵ *Yuanqi* differ from sūtra lecture texts however by being strictly narrative and told by one person. Thus, research, which has significantly expanded our under-

⁶⁰ T no. 2059.

⁶¹ T no. 2060.

⁶² John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography*, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 10 (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1997), pp. 123–27, surveys a variety of examples from both these texts. A vividly detailed account of one such competitive debate is in *Lushan Yuangong hua* 廬山遠公話 (trans. Victor Mair and Tansen Sen as “The Tale of Master Yuan of Mount Lu” in Victor Mair, Nancy Steinhardt, and Paul Goldin, eds., *Hawaii Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture* [Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 2005], pp. 323–29). At the same time, these lectures mirror and expand features of the classical tradition of private learning 私學 (or *jiangxue* 講學) once common in the Han period, when only the best students would be accepted for intimate dialogue or debate with the teacher. Buddhism maintained this tradition from the post-Han period until the late Tang, when it was gradually revived, most notably by Zhu Xi; see Thomas H. C. Lee, “Chu Hsi, Academies, and the Tradition of Private Chiang-hsüeh,” *Chinese Studies* 2.1 (1984), p. 309; and idem, *Education in Traditional China, A History*, Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section Four, China, vol. 13 (Brill: Leiden, 2000), pp. 262–76.

⁶³ Schmid, “*Yuanqi*,” pp. 4–14. The three sūtras mentioned here are T, nos. 200, 202, and 203, respectively.

⁶⁴ A shared genre-marker (*yuan* 緣, *yuanqi* 緣 or *yinyuan* 因緣); verse-introductory formula (*dang'er zhi shi he yanyu* 當爾之時道何言語); shared semi-vernacular style and diction; metatextual exhortations to the listeners; similarity in mode of delivery as indicated by marginalia; similarity in length; strictly Buddhist content; and narrative setting (all take place in India). These features clearly differentiate this genre of narratives from *bianwen* 變文, transformation texts; see Schmid, “*Yuanqi*.”

⁶⁵ Like sūtra lecture texts, a number of these narratives include a seat-settling text, annotations for recitation that are the same as those found on sūtra lecture texts, praise of local elites, the transference of merit, and similar texts for dispersing the audience (*jiejiang* 解講). The narratives are: “Destruction of the Transforming Demons” (“Po Mo bian” 破魔變, P.2187),

standing of the liturgy, demonstrates that though they functioned on different levels of comprehension and to different ends – sūtra lecture texts providing exegetical exposition of doctrine and *yuanqi* providing concrete narrative elaboration of karma – they were presented in the same mode and in the same liturgical context, the popular lecture. This bifurcated mode of proselytizing finds a precedent in an earlier style known as “sing and lead 唱導” that was current from the Six Dynasties period to the Tang.⁶⁶

We have detailed contemporaneous descriptions of popular lectures from Ennin 圓仁,⁶⁷ and a vivid account is found in the Dunhuang story of Huiyuan 慧遠.⁶⁸ These sūtra expositions became spectacles drawing hundreds and at times thousands of people. Popular lectures were held by imperial command and by the ruling élite, as well as by lay Buddhist societies known as *she* 社.⁶⁹ Lectures held by lay associations, usually in the spring and in the fall, would last at a minimum seven days and at a maximum twenty-eight depending on the association’s finances. Through material giving (*caishi*), such lengthy spectacles demonstrated to all listeners the patrons’ charitable largesse by having enabled the gift of the Dharma 施法 through the clergy. The patronage also publicly reinforced social relations and hierarchy, while fostering community solidarity.⁷⁰

“Circumstances of Prince Siddhārtha Cultivating the Way” (“Xida taizi xiu dao yinyuan” 悉達太子修道因緣 [Ryūtani University ms.]), and “Circumstances of the Transformation of the Maiden in the Woman’s Palace of King Bimbisāra, Śrīmātī [Śrīpuṇyamati], Who is Reborn in Heaven for Having Made Offerings to a Stūpa” (“Binbishaluo wang hougong cainü Gongdeyi gongyang ta sheng tian yinyuan bian” 頻婆娑羅王后宮綵女功德意供養塔生天因緣變, S.3491). Other narrative texts, such as the “apocryphal” “Scripture of the Crown Prince Attaining the Way” *Taizi cheng dao jing* 太子成道經, P.2999, also share these defining features.

⁶⁶ Both sūtra-lecture texts and *yuanqi* are the continuation and development of an earlier type of liturgy led by *changdaoshi* 唱導師 “masters of singing and leading.” These monks were accomplished narrators and worked in tandem with monks who specialized in specific sūtras. See *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (T no. 2059, vol. 50, pp. 417B–18A, and the discussion by Schmid, “*Yuanqi*,” pp. 153–56).

⁶⁷ Ennin gives thorough descriptions of popular lectures (Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin’s Diary: The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law* [New York: The Ronald Press, 1955], pp. 150–56). On their beginning in the mornings, see esp., pp. 151, 152, and 154.

⁶⁸ “The Tale of Master Yuan of Mount Lu” (“Lushan Yuan gong hua” 廬山遠公話; S.2073), ed. *DHBW* 77Z, pp. 252–97; see trans. Sen and Mair, “The Tale of Master Yuan of Mount Lu,” pp. 304–39.

⁶⁹ Ennin provides multiple examples of lectures held by imperial order (Reischauer, *Ennin’s Diary*, pp. 298–99, 310, 316). For lay patronage associations, see Naba Toshisada 那波刊貞, “Zokkō to henbun” 俗講と變文, in idem, *Tōdai shakai bunka shi kenkyū* 唐代社會文化史研究, Tōyō sōsho 8 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1974), pp. 395–458, esp. 403 ff; and Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese History: an Economic History from the 5th to the 10th Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia U.P., 1995), pp. 259–77.

⁷⁰ Although donations for sūtra recitation (*nianjing* 念經 or *zhuanjing* 轉經) could be dedicated to any member of society, living or dead (Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, pp.

Just as the sūtra lecture centers on the authority and exegetical actions of the officiating monk, so the configurations of high-Tang caves centers on the symbol of scholarly authority and power, the *zhang*, long associated with exegesis. Classical Chinese models and influences inform both the *zhang* and the sūtra lecture, the sūtra lecture being de-



Figure 13. Monk Seated on Zhang, Mogao Cave 321
Early-Tang; Treasure Rain Sūtra Tableau. From
DHSKQJ 9, pl. 185.

derived in part from classical exegetical techniques of the late-Han period.⁷¹ The terminology is indicative of this connection, the label *dujiang* being used in scholarly circles in the Han.⁷² (In Buddhism, the expressions *zong* 宗, “sect,” and *zu* 祖, “ancestor” or “patriarch,” also reveal a conceptualization of pedagogical authority with origins in classical Chinese learning.) Interestingly, the only portrayal of the *zhang* in Dunhuang caves other than those associated with Vimalakīrti and Raudrakṣa, discussed above, is found in cave 321 on the south wall, which shows the *Treasure Rain Sūtra* (*Baoyu jing* 寶雨經) tableau.⁷³ (See figure 13.)

203–6), dedication of Dunhuang sūtra lectures and *yuanyi* were often to the ruling élite (cf. P.2187, P.3808, “Sūtra Lecture Text for the Imperial Birthday of the Year 933 in the Hall of Restoration” 長興四年中興殿應聖節講經文, and the “Destruction of the Transforming Demons” [“Po Mo bian” 破魔變; ed. *DHBWJJZ*, pp. 531–51]), where in the latter the merit of the preceding “sūtra lecture” (*jiangjing*) is dedicated to Zhang Yichao 張義潮, referred to as holding the position *puyue* 僕射, in order that he may live one hundred thousand years 講經功德, 更祝僕射萬萬年 (*DHBWJJZ*, pp. 536.19).

⁷¹ See Mou Runsun 牟潤孫, “Lun Ru Shi liang jia zhi jiangjing yu yishu” 論儒釋兩家之講經與義疏, *Xinya xuebao* 新亞學報 4.2 (1952), pp. 362–75.

⁷² *Hou Hanshu* 26, p. 901.

⁷³ This is *T*, no. 660. The identification of this tableau is contested. Wang Huimin 王惠民, “Dunhuang 321, 74 ku Shilun jingbian kaoshi” 敦煌 321, 74 窟十輪經變考釋, *Yishushi yanjiu* 藝

The figure sitting on the *zhang* is clearly a monk, as is the character facing him; they appear to be engaged in debate. But the parallels between the officiant of the sūtra lecture and the Buddha positioned in the *zhang* extend beyond this object, as important as it is, to the pictorial program as a whole. The liturgical ritual and its primary constituent parts, exegesis and storytelling, configured the ritual's textual remnants used outside the caves and its visual expression within, both of which were made possible by donors' support. Thus, subsequent to the new style of *zhang*, three additional fundamental and consistent elements began to occupy pictorial space on the walls of late-Tang period caves: exegesis, narrative, and donors.

Bianxiang and Exegesis

During the eighth century the term *bianxiang* became circumscribed in its usage. As Wu Hung states: "From the High Tang on, the terms *bian* and *bianxiang* were used more strictly: they no longer designated sculptured forms but referred only to pictorial images, they were mainly associated with complex sūtra illustrations, and never with individual icons, even painted ones."⁷⁴ The time period corresponds exactly to the shift in pictorial program, as the *zhang* became the standard representation of the western niche, transformation tableaux become defined as distinct objects (framed by *trompe l'oeil*), narrative screens constituted the lower register, and, finally, when the popular lecture was most in vogue.⁷⁵

Bianxiang represent sūtra texts, and the latter correspond to the sūtras that formed the subjects of exegetical texts. Of the twenty-four extant sūtra-lecture texts, only one is not represented, *Sūtra-Lecture Text on the Yulanben Sūtra* (*Yulanben jing jiangjing wen* 盂蘭盆經講經文). Much has been made about the lack of correspondence and the "unreadable" or "untextual" non-sequential nature of the episodes in the transformation tableaux at Dunhuang, and of the problems created by trying to shoehorn the tableaux into a textually dominant mode of understanding illustrations. The situation is further complicated by the fact that texts found in cartouches rarely match the texts of the scriptures depicted. A paradigm predicated instead on the sūtra lecture provides an alternative model grounded in ritual experience. Understood from the standpoint

術史研究6 (2004), pp. 30936, argues for the mural as a depiction of *Scripture of the Ten Cakras of Kṣitigarbha* (*Dizang Shilun jing* 地藏十輪經, Tno. 411).

⁷⁴ Wu Hung, "What is *Bianxiang*? On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature," *HJAS* 52.1 (1992), p. 119.

⁷⁵ Schmid, "Yuanqi."

of popular lecture, the lack of sequence not only makes sense but is in fact necessary. Sūtra lectures and sūtra lecture texts do not follow linearity of the sūtra as a whole – they are episodic. Typically, one chapter of a sūtra will be the subject of a sūtra lecture, and that chapter in itself could take days. It would be pointless to prioritize images on the basis of consecutive chapters, given the variable needs of the donors, patrons, and other circumstances that may have necessitated a particular lecture. This understanding of *bianxiang* is to supplement, not to obviate, other interpretations of the murals' functions. Eugene Wang writes, "The intent behind the design appears to be the creation of an imaginary topography to situate and immerse the beholder, instead of providing an illustrated version for him to 'read' and understand."⁷⁶ I would argue that the need to situate and immerse the beholder is especially relevant when the beholder's exposure to the sūtra through the sūtra lecture is itself episodic and sporadic. The *bianxiang* serves the crucial function as providing both a unifying scene for the sūtra and a point of focus for the viewer – devotionally, meditatively, and liturgically. Thus, it is not that texts inform these images, or that the images are somehow dependent on texts, it is rather that the two stand in dialogue through ritual. As demonstrated here and below, a consequence of this model is that it pushes us beyond the inadequacies of the text-image binary.

Both sūtra lectures and *bianxiang* function in a consistent manner: as icons, the tableaux and the sūtra-lecture texts are both participatory. Icons serve to establish a one-to-one relationship with the viewer, with the elements of the composition drawing the gaze inward to the central figure, who in turn is looking out toward the viewer.⁷⁷ Just as the viewer is implicated in the interaction with the tableau and its central figure, so too is the listener engaged with the exegetical act led by the officiant. This occurs not only on the level of comprehension but also on the level of mental concentration and physical effort. Throughout sūtra-lecture texts, annotations and prompts request the audience to invoke a Buddha by either chanting his name 念佛名 or that of Avalokiteśvara (or simply "bodhisattva" [*Guanshiyin*] *pusa* [觀世音] 菩薩). The opening lines of seat-settling texts will at times directly invite buddhas and bo-

⁷⁶ Eugene Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sūtra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2005), p. 74.

⁷⁷ For a discussion of what defines icon in the Chinese context, see Wu, "What is *Bianxiang*," pp. 129–30.

dhisattvas to descend directly to the ritual ground.⁷⁸ A third prompt establishes an individual's relationship with the Buddha through the repetition of the 佛子 "disciple of the Buddha."⁷⁹ These three prompts encourage connection and communication with the Buddha, manifest in the object or image. Lecture texts then are not simply doctrinal and exegetical works on sūtras, they are also devotional, a point which I elaborate, below. In this sense they represent the ritual interaction with particular scriptures found both in the form of a text as sūtra and in the form of an image as transformation or sūtra tableau. The power and agency of these pious objects are of course metonymical for that of a Buddha or bodhisattva, the scripture in a sense being anthropomorphized through the image. Consequently, both the tableaux and sūtra lecture function on multiple levels to foster understanding of, meditation on, and devotion to the Dharma, all of which is centered on the figure of authority – a representation of a monk or Buddha. However, two final elements remain unexplained in this confluence of image, ritual, and text, namely the winged screens and the donors.

Winged Screens and yuanqi

Another significant change during mid-Tang was the addition and standardization of narratives in the form of winged screens occupying the lower register of cave walls. Like *bianxiang* and *zhang*, they became standard in the caves of this time. Wu Hung's recent work, *The Double Screen*,⁸⁰ discusses paintings that depict screens with an adjacent figure, arguing that they establish a metaphoric connection between the figure and the content of the screens. The screen by its very format and arrangement at ground, or human, level allows this sort of mapping function.⁸¹ In the lower register of Dunhuang caves from the eighth

⁷⁸ "Good! Great wise, great compassionate worthy and the innumerable buddhas of the ten directions, we wish that each of you ride upon floral and bejeweled seats and wish that you now descend to the sacred ground." 善哉大聖大慈尊, 三世十方無數佛, 各願乘花兼寶座, 惟願今朝降道場 (F.109, titled simply "Seat-settling text" *yazuo wen* 押座文; *DHBWJJZ*, p. 1169).

⁷⁹ "The Sūtra Lecture Text on the Amitabha Sūtra as Spoken by the Buddha" ("Fo shuo Amituo jing jiangjing wen" 佛說阿彌陀經講經文; S.6551; *DHBWJJZ*, pp. 679–703), clearly meant for oral delivery, gives explicit instructions of what to say and how many times repeated. These reminders occur at the end of a prose passage before the beginning of the verse. At one point (*DHBWJJZ*, p. 680.1) the narrator states, "say the Buddha's name three or five [several] times, Buddha's disciples" 稱三五聲佛名佛子, and later simply "say the Buddha's name, Buddha's disciples" 稱佛名佛子 (*DHBWJJZ*, p. 681.5–6).

⁸⁰ Wu, *Double Screen*, pp. 20–21.

⁸¹ Intriguingly, an alternative name for *avadāna* and *jātaka* texts is *biyu* 比喻 or *piyu* 譬喻, translated as parable or metaphor. The primary function of them was to provide a means to understand one's actions and their consequences in specifically Buddhist terms. This would by necessity entail a mapping of the stories onto the adherents' lives and actions; see Schmid, "Yuanqi," pp. 41–65.

century until the beginning of the Xixia 西夏 period in the 1000s, this potential is used to full effect. Initially a space dominated by donor figures in earlier caves, the screens experienced a transition – occupied first by images of (lay/potential) bodhisattvas and then increasingly by karmic narratives. In contrast to the realm of the buddhas above them, this shows the human realm. It is here that we stand literally face-to-face with the workings of karma. Like multiple lives, the screens succeed each other one by one, providing ample opportunity to observe the causes and effects of karma. And like *yuangqi* stories, such screens bring narrative into doctrine, rendering in the concrete and particular terms of time, place, and agent the abstract and universal principles of retributive causality. The narratives, both textual and painted, need no exegesis.

What is striking about the painted screens is not that they are simply karmic narratives like *yuangqi*, but that, taken together, they have the same genre constraints as the stories used in liturgies, and, in a number of cases, are the very same narratives. Specific parameters bearing on the content of *yuangqi* narratives also hold true for narrative screens:⁸² they all take place in India before or during the time of the historical Buddha; they embrace the two distinct genres of *avadāna* and *jātaka* tales, as well as stories from the life of the historical Buddha (*benxing* 本行); and, finally, they include no secular narratives. Stories found both in texts and in paintings are drawn from the *Sūtra of the Wise and Foolish* (*Xianyu jing* 賢愚經); *Sūtra of the Storehouse of Miscellaneous Treasures* (*Zabao zang jing* 雜寶藏經); *Sūtra of the Collection of Buddha's Original Deeds* (*Fo benxing jijing* 佛本行集經); *Sūtra of a Hundred Circumstances* (*Baiyuan jing* 百緣經); and the Prince Sudhana *avadāna* (*Xudana taizi haoshi yinyuan* 須達拿太子好施因緣; Skt.: *Sudhanakumarāvadāna*).⁸³ All *yuangqi* performed in liturgies are elaborations of those found in these canonical scriptures. Likewise, all painted narratives are elaborations of an oral narrative; the texts in cartouches do not correspond to extant manuscripts. This oral intermediary is a feature that these narrative screens share with *bianxiang*. Thus, both transformation tableaux and screens share a remarkable number of characteristics and functions with *yuangqi* and *jiangjing*

⁸² Here I am referring to the available texts that mostly date from the late-9th and 10th cc. The screens used for comparison also date from that period, i.e., from caves 85, 94, 72, 98, 146, 108, 454, 61, 55, and 431.

⁸³ The four sūtras here are, respectively, Tnos. 202, 203, 190, and 200. For the corpus of *yuangqi* narratives found at Dunhuang, see Schmid, “*Yuangqi*,” pp. 7–14. The Dunhuang ms. (F101) of the Chinese elaboration of the Prince Sudhana *avadāna* (“*Xudana taizi haoshi yinyuan*” 須達拿太子好施因緣; Skt.: *Sudhanakumarāvadāna*) is highly fragmentary. Additional Dunhuang texts exist in Khotanese: P.2896, P.2957, P.2784, P.2025, Ch 00266, P.2957.

wen; all four media are informed by the ritual liturgy. Together with the *zhang* as a teaching platform signifying exegesis and authority, these objects and their liturgical counterparts establish the caves as replication of the contemporaneous space of the lecture ritual and thus the propagation of the Dharma. However, none of this would be possible were it not for the charitable actions of donors and patrons.

Donors and Patrons

The presence of donors and patrons at Dunhuang should not be underestimated – of the 43,830 square meters of painted space in the caves, 7,000 portraits occupy a third – they are very much present.⁸⁴ Another aspect of the overall, major shift was the great increase in size of figures and portraits, so much so that, by the Five Dynasties period they were larger than life. Additionally, their placement in the donor procession significantly was altered. In early caves up to the Sui (581–618) period, donors were led by monks, but from beginning around the early 600s it was the primary lay donor or patron, and his family, who head the pageant. They continue to occupy the lower register of the pictorial program in line with painted screens containing karmic narratives. This laicization is mirrored in the content of the shrines – the change from monk- or clergy-oriented to relatively lay-patronized caves. This is especially apparent in the development of “family caves” (*jiaku*), which increasingly dominated Mogao grottoes from the Sui period onwards, bringing social and political concerns to bear on their construction.⁸⁵

As Eugene Wang points out,⁸⁶ explicit votive inscriptions of Sui date that clarify exact motivations for the construction of the shrines are lacking. Inscriptions from later caves are parsimonious in their detail, often simply stating that “the offerings are made with a concentrated mind [for the benefit of so and so] 一心供養.” What in fact is stated is whether the person was living or deceased at the time of construction. This idealized blend in which living and dead are united at the moment of worship entails an expanded notion of temporal space. Cave 300 (mid-Tang) clarifies this as a locus in time occurring *within* the cave through the added word *shi* 時, here understood to mark a narrative sequence, that is, the donor “...in the moment of offering 供養時.”⁸⁷ The donors are

⁸⁴ Edith Wiercimok, “The Donor Figure in the Buddhist Painting of Dunhuang,” *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 1 (1990), p. 203.

⁸⁵ Ning, *Art, Politics, and Religion*, pp. 107–15.

⁸⁶ Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sūtra*, pp. 75–76.

⁸⁷ Shi Yai 史岩, *Dunhuang shishi huaxiang tishi* 敦煌石室畫像題識 (Chengdu: The Insti-

thus depicted in the moment of action in a space that transcends time. As donors to the construction of the caves, they are offering material goods. A comparison with votive colophons on scriptures and painting indicates the same language was used for both types of material objects.⁸⁸ These gifts of material goods (*caishi* 財施) allow for the gift of the Law (*fashi* 法施), and here the laity is filling its role enabling the best of all gifts, the teaching of the Dharma (*shuofa* 說法).⁸⁹

The performance of the liturgy functioned to unite participants, officiating monk, and devotional image through the creation of “shared merit” (*jieyuan* 結緣) for a better rebirth. The term *jieyuan* refers to the karmic bond that one formed first with the Buddha and second with those who shared the experience.⁹⁰ In medieval China, creating karmic bonds frequently was referenced in relation to the two activities of giving material goods and a group experience of hearing the Dharma. Popular lectures were often calls for donations to fund the building and repair of monasteries. Ennin mentions, for example, that the minister of state called for popular lectures on scriptures and raising of funds 募緣 to be held for the repair of Kaiyuan 開元 Monastery and asked that the Japanese entourage donate money, thereby establishing “karmic affinities” (also *jieyuan*).⁹¹ The lectures lasted two months and were well attended, including foreign dignitaries. Very similar kinds of proselytizing ritual took place in Japan under the name of *kōshiki* 講式, that is, “Buddhist ceremonials,”⁹² which are strikingly like sūtra lectures in textual form and ritual steps.⁹³ In the ceremony, the officiating monk

tute of Comparative Cultures, National Research Institute of Tun-huang and the West China Union Museum 比較文化研究所, 國立敦煌藝術研究院, 華西大學博物館聯合出版社, 1947). This phrase also occurs in later Xixia caves, e.g., 307.

⁸⁸ Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sūtra*, pp. 75–76. For paintings, see Arthur Waley, *Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-huang by Sir Aurel Stein* (London: British Museum, 1931).

⁸⁹ See above, n. 55.

⁹⁰ The use of *yuan* 緣 (*yinyuan* 因緣, *yuanci* 緣起) as (collective) karmic circumstances stems in part from the sinicization of the Buddhist concepts *hetu-pratyaya* (primary and secondary causes), *yinyuan* 因緣 in its blend with the indigenous system of sympathetic resonance *gan-ying* 感應, and the Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) to create distinctly Chinese understandings of causation in which the operation of grace (other-power; *tali* 他力) could operate. For discussion of the reconceptualization of *yinyuan* in terms of the Five Phases, see Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 2001), pp. 128–31.

⁹¹ Reischauer, *Ennin's Diary*, pp. 68–69.

⁹² Neils Guelberg, “Buddhist Ceremonials (*kōshiki*) of Medieval Japan and Their Impact on Literature,” *Annual of the Institute for Comprehensive Studies of Buddhism* 15 (1994), pp. 66–81, and idem, *Buddhistische Zeremoniale [Kōshiki] und ihre Bedeutung für die Literatur des japanischen Mittelalters* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999).

⁹³ This ritual and its literature have only recently come to the attention of scholars. Tsukudo Reikan 筑土鈴寛 (“Kōshiki no rekishiteki kōsatsu” 講式の歴史的考察, in Tsukudo Reikan,

recites a lecture text while the congregation chants praises of either a particular Buddha, eminent clerical figure, or sūtra present in the form of a statue or a text that functions as the devotional object *honzon* 本尊. Like the popular lecture, it was also used economically to gather donations, funds, and materials. Through the writings of Genshin 源信 and Jōkei 貞慶, *kōshiki* became a standard form of religious practice and literature and a primary means of proselytizing in medieval Japan.⁹⁴ In its combination of texts, rituals, and images, the liturgical form was crucial in extending Buddhism's economic and social reach, as well as devotional practices.⁹⁵ Both in Japan and in China these changes in devotional practice reflected an increasing orientation toward rebirth in the Pure Land 往生. The religious and social elements of these dynamics, configured specifically in terms of the sūtra lecture, are represented through the spaces and images within the caves at Dunhuang.

A useful analogue to the interaction of donors, merit, and objects can be found in medieval India. Gregory Schopen's article "Filial Piety and the Monk" discusses the curious phenomenon whereby donations of religious gifts, such as relics, stupas, images, and paintings, lacked economic value, had no recipient, and bore inscriptions that were never meant to be read. Why then, he asks, were the names and titles of donors recorded so carefully? Schopen concludes that it is because these objects were religious in nature, and that they enabled worship by others:

They were, then, really giving to any of their fellow beings who ritually approached those objects both the means and opportunity to make merit: they were providing for all both the opportunity and the means to further their religious lives. But this would also seem to suggest that the initial gift of the actual object only marked the first moment in the donor's act of giving. Each time the object was approached, he or the persons to whom he transferred his act of giving was to be credited for providing an additional opportunity for someone else to make merit. The donor's act of giving and its

Chūsei geibun no kenkyū 中世芸文の研究 [Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1966], pp. 324–41), and Yamada Shōzen 山田昭全 ("Kōshiki: Sono seiritsu to tenkai" 講式, その成立と展開, in vol. 8 of *Bukkyō bungaku kōza: Shōdō no bungaku* 仏教文学講座, 唱導の文学, ed. Itō Hiroyuki 伊藤博之, Imanari Genshō 今成元昭, and Yamada Shōzen [Tokyo: Benseisha, 1995], pp. 11–53) provide overviews of *kōshiki*. Scholars at Taishō University in the *Kōshiki kenkyūkai* have produced a substantial amount of research on the major texts and central figures.

⁹⁴ James Ford, *Jōkei and Buddhist Devotion in Early Medieval Japan* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2006), discusses the use of *kōshiki* rituals in the Jōkei's career and his role in the formation of medieval Japanese Buddhism.

⁹⁵ The origins of the Japanese ceremonials *kōshiki* and dharma meetings (*hōe* 法會) in Chinese Buddhist practices together with comparisons to Dunhuang materials have yet to be investigated.

consequent merit, then, were continually repeated over time in every act of worship directed toward the object provided. It was the donor's initial act that in a very concrete sense made each consecutive act of worship possible. It was because of the donor's act was continually repeated over time, because it took place again and again long after the donor himself disappeared, that it was necessary to clearly record the donor's name, the moment of the initial act, and – most importantly – the donor's intentions.⁹⁶

Using the same logic, the Dunhuang caves present a variation: the material objects are given to the Buddha for promulgation of the Law in order that the donors, patrons, and their relations may benefit eternally. Including themselves in the picture, so to speak, ensures that the donors *do not* disappear, that all those present, while maintaining their social relationships,⁹⁷ benefit from their continual devotional position before the Buddha in an implied liturgical act.⁹⁸ Significantly, in China this situation became a distinctly domestic affair: these are family shrines and their private nature reflects the intimacy not only of the act but also of its benefits.⁹⁹ It is crucial to note that the Mogao caves include depictions of the living and the dead and thereby represent

⁹⁶ Gregory Schopen, "Filial Piety and the Monk in the Practice of Indian Buddhism: A Question of 'Sinicization' Viewed from the Other Side," in idem, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1997) pp. 66–67.

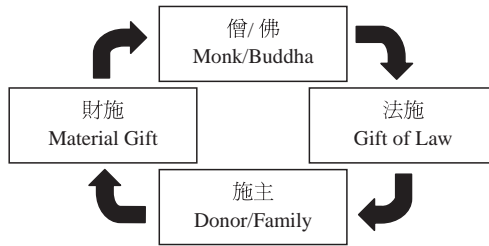
⁹⁷ An interesting comparison here would be the imperial practice of *peiling* 陪陵 "accompanying burials," which became prevalent during the Tang. Imperial permission was granted for the burial of not only relatives but also of meritorious military and civil officials. This, in effect, fixed hierarchy and relationships in perpetuity. Although Tang imperial tombs were of two types, a mound based on Qin-Han models and those carved into a mountain-side, the majority were of the latter configuration. It was in these mountain-side tombs that accompanying burials were most prevalent (Howard Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty* [New Haven: Yale U.P., 1985], pp. 150–60). A further comparison would be with later Liao imperial tombs, where a similar practice to Tang imperial burials took place. In these cases, however, figures were painted on walls and not actually interred. Citing the *History of the Liao* (*Liaoshi* 遼史 [Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1996] 18, p. 212) on emperor Shengzong's death in 1031 and the request to include portraits of two prime minister in both ancestral hall and tomb, Tsao Hsingyuan writes, "Although underground and above ground portraits might have different audiences, their significance was similar, to extend their relationship into the other world" (Tsao, "A Deer for the Palace: A Reconsideration of the *Deer in an Autumn Forest* Paintings," in M. K. Hearn and J. G. Smith, eds., *Arts of the Sung and Yuan* [New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997], pp. 197–98).

⁹⁸ Stein painting 14, for example, illustrates the adherents in a position of making offerings that in the accompanying cartouche are said to be in perpetuity (*yongheng* 永恒). See the discussion of this painting and its cartouche in Wendi Adamek, "The Impossibility of the Given: A Look at Chinese Buddhist Donor Inscriptions," *History of Religions* 45 (2005), pp. 156–59.

⁹⁹ The motivation for constructing caves however is no different from the construction of temples by the ruling elite of the heartland, that of *zhuifu* 追福 ("posthumous well-being") for deceased relatives. For a discussion of great temples *dasi* 大寺 built as gestures of filial piety by the imperial family in medieval China, see Antonino Forte, "Daji (Chine)," in Paul Demiéville,

both premortem and postmortem ritual spaces, thus providing merit for all depicted.¹⁰⁰ Yet, it is the initial gift of the cave and its material objects – the *zhang*,¹⁰¹ paintings, screens, and even fabrics – that makes the continual production of merit possible.

Such donations were in no way different from donations to a monastery, which indeed were gifts to the Buddha that was present there.¹⁰² The act of giving to the Three Jewels, as opposed to receiving, was the act that hastened the donor's transformation into a bodhisattva.¹⁰³ The chart, below, provides a summary: starting a cycle of merit with the gift of material goods, the sūtra lecture (see "Gift of Law") was a demonstrative ceremony that could create merit, which in turn permitted the salvation of others ("Donor and Family") by propagating the Dharma through a Material Gift, leading eventually to the salvation of the self.



Hubert Durt, and Anna Seidel, eds., *Hōbōgirin: Dictionnaire encyclopédique du Bouddhisme d'après les sources chinoises et japonaises* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1983) 6, pp. 682–704. There are strong parallels between Dunhuang caves and “merit cloisters” (*gongde yuan* 功德院; also analogous buildings such as “merit-cemetery temple” *gongde fensi* 功德墳寺, or tomb temples *fensi* 墳寺 or *fenan* 墳庵) as Buddhist structures built for the cult of the ancestors which remain unexamined. In 713, the Tang Xuanzong passed an edict forbidding the creation of merit cloisters by elite families (Dennis Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3: *Sui and Tang China, 589–906, Part 1* [Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1979], p. 361). It would be interesting to ascertain any influence this edict may have had on the large number and types of caves constructed during this period at Dunhuang.

¹⁰⁰ Religious services were most efficacious for the living, while the deceased only received one-seventh of the merit; see *Scripture on the Original Vows of the Bodhisattva Dizang* (*Dizang pusa ben yuan jing* 地藏菩薩本緣經; attrib. Śikṣānanda, 652–710; Tno. 412, vol. 13, p. 784B).

¹⁰¹ In his discussion of sandalwood (*candana*) and its importance to Buddhist culture, Edward Schafer (*The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study in Tang Exotics* [Berkeley: U. of California P., 1963], pp. 137–38) mentions two (20-ft. high!) sandalwood platforms presented to the monks of Anguosi 安國寺 in 871 by emperor Yizong 懿宗 “to be used by lecturers on the sūtras.”

¹⁰² Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism*, p. 158, for a discussion of the seven acts which gain a donor merit (one being the furnishing of monasteries). Fraser (*Performing the Visual*, pp. 90–98) discusses wooden temples as prototypes for Dunhuang caves. Decorations of temples would have included hanging silk paintings known as *zhenghua* 幀畫. Examples of these are the large-scale silk paintings, “*bian* 變,” of the *Huayan jing* 華嚴經 from Cave 17 are found in the collection of the Musée Guimet, Paris.

¹⁰³ Of donations to the sangha and the exchange it engendered, Gernet (*Buddhism in Chi-*

The pictorial program of the caves clearly represents these objects as material items, and moreover portrays them as portable and impermanent objects. Their ephemeral quality reinforces the temporality of the scene and hence its veracity. The *zhang*, which, in the context of the *sūtra* lecture discussed above, was set up according to the demands of time and space, frames the Buddha in terms familiar to the donors and patrons, rendering him as the functional equal to a lecturer.¹⁰⁴ The extensive use of fabrics and valances heightens the effect of ephemerality. The lower register of the artistic program's configuration, winged screens (conveying even gratuitous hinges), owe part of their utility to their portability, able to construct and define space at will.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, their contents (images and themes) are changeable according to

nese History, p. 217) writes, "Pious and charitable offerings together formed a coherent system that did not aim at an accumulation of goods but at their redistribution and circulation; not at growing profits but at expenditures. ... To receive gifts of the Three Jewels engendered pious thoughts as well as feelings of gratitude and respect: one was bound by such gratuitous generosity. But the effect of giving to the *triratna* was more profound yet, for it led to the gradual transformation of the donor into a *bodhisattva*."

¹⁰⁴ This then is an interesting reversal of the later Chan practice of the abbot's occupying the position and role of the Buddha in the dharma hall. This situation then was also operative for clergy as lecturers in a more general sense, where they assumed the seated position of Buddha on a teaching platform. In their discussion of the rite of "ascending the hall" (*shang-tang* 上堂), T. Griffith Foulk and Robert H. Sharf, "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China," *CEA* 7 (1993-1994), p. 195, state, "The significance of this rite, in which the abbot ascended an altar functionally homologous to the altar occupied by a Buddha icon, was unambiguous: the abbot was rendered the spiritual equal of the Tathāgatha." The porous nature of this positioning, both in the context of the monastery and in the cave, is clearly advantageous to the clergy.

In this light, the *zhang* as the seat of a Buddha finds another use not discussed above: as a box for Buddhist relics. An ink inscription written on the reliquary from Famensi, Shaanxi, states: "On the fifteenth day of the second month in the second year of the Jinglong [reign] (708) of the Great Tang [dynasty], the monk Fazang and others made this marble, numinous tent, on account of the relic entering the pagoda at this time, and recorded this [event]. 大唐景龍二年歲次戊申二月乙丑朔十五日己卯派沙門法藏等造白石靈帳一鋪以其時舍利入塔故書記之." For a discussion of the reliquary, see Famensi kaogudui 法門寺考古隊, "Fufeng Famensi Tangdai digong fajue jianbao" 扶風法門寺唐代地宮發掘簡報, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古與文物 2 (1988), pp. 94-106, and Shaanxisheng Famensi kaogudui 陝西省法門寺考古隊, "Fufeng Famensi Tangdai digong fajue jianbao" 扶風法門寺唐代地宮發掘簡報, *WW* 10 (1988), pp. 1-26. (I would like to thank Iman Lai for bringing this inscription to my attention.) Another remarkably well-preserved example is the relic box from Songyimsa in Korea (Kim Chewon, "Treasures from the Songyimsa Temple in Southern Korea," *Artibus Asiae* 22.1-2 [1959], figs. 8, 11, 14). At Dunhuang, the parinirvana scene in Cave 148 features the same form as a bier carrying the Buddha's body after his death. These objects all differ in structure from the niche as *zhang* in that the base is different (not on a scalloped platform) and that there are no winged screens closing the three sides. The complex and fascinating relationship between the *zhang* as a teaching platform and as reliquary and their connections to earlier funerary couches deserve attention.

¹⁰⁵ Screens depicted *within* the murals (i.e., in illustrations within transformation tableaux, not the lower register) at Dunhuang are often found in temporary structures such as tents for marriage feasts and of course within *zhang* such as Vimalakirti's.

the demands of the situation, rendering the choice of subject matter in each cave all the more significant for its permanence. As in life, all these objects serve as both visual and material culture, which then anchors particular religious ideas and specific practices.

The fact that the gifts are so realistically illustrated as such is to clarify and affirm them as material objects. The use of realism and of *trompe l'oeil* stylization in the depiction of Dunhuang caves has gone unexamined, but its analysis here is crucial to understanding the subject's perceptual and experiential field.¹⁰⁶ The realism of painted objects has three primary conceptual functions: 1. to affirm and legitimize the objects that constitute the pictorial space as material gifts; 2. portray the physicality of the liturgical setting given the "unreality" of its performance; 3. depict objects in their plenitude and particularity and thus to convey their numinous power. The latter is especially important in the case of transformation tableaux. As images conflating sūtra, deity, and Pure Land, they were employed as soteriological devices, having the power to transform karmically by cleansing previous defilements and to facilitate the dying's rebirth in a Pure Land.¹⁰⁷ Their use in both pre- and postmortem rituals in medieval China is mirrored within these caves, which contain portraits of the living and the dead. As indicated above, the *zhang* in particular has rich associations in Chinese traditions of exegesis appropriated by Buddhism which in turn are foregrounded in murals in ways specifically relevant to the local socio-political context at Dunhuang. The lifelike status of these objects then substitutes or fills in for presence and allows for the hypostatization of a performative moment in its efficacy.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Here I distinguish the functional realism from the pictorial illusionism found in transformation tableaux, as discussed by Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sūtra*, pp. 238–316. It may be, however, that the former was an elaboration of the latter.

¹⁰⁷ Wang Wei's "Eulogy on a Transformation of Western Paradise of Amitabha Painted on the Stupa of the Temple of Filiality and Duty by the Grand Secretary of the Imperial Chancellery, Dou Shao, for his Deceased Younger Brother, the Late Husband of the Imperial Princess, with Preface" 給事中竇紹爲亡弟故駙馬都尉于孝義寺浮圖畫西方阿彌陀變讚并序, states that the image itself is to cleanse the deceased's karma 尙茲繪事, 滌彼染業 allowing the transformation to occur, in expectation that the subtle or perfect body then can attain the Pure Land 則變爲妙身, 之於樂土 (*Quan Tangwen* 全唐文 [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990] 325, p. 1459). Mair (*Tang Transformation Texts*, p. 47) and Wang (*Shaping the Lotus Sūtra*, pp. xvi–xvii) also discuss this poem but do not examine the soteriological uses of this or other *bianxiang*. In my forthcoming *Buddhist Proselytization*, I discuss at length the meaning of *bian* as "karmic transformation" through an examination of a wide range of materials, elite and popular, and provide a different interpretation of the term and its uses from those of Mair and others.

¹⁰⁸ Curiously unstudied is the ritual function of donor portraits in the Mogao caves in terms of their realism. In the case of Chan funerals, for example, the portrait served as the locus for the spirit and thus required a high degree of realism (Robert Sharf, "The Idolization of Enlightenment: On Mummification of Ch'an Masters in Medieval China," *History of Religions* 32.1 [August 1992], pp. 19–20).

At the same time however, these visual materials, texts, and the rituals that occasioned them are indicative of changes through time, harbingers of the transformations to come in Song-era religious culture. It would be a time when “the vernacularization of ritual and communication with the divine, in addition to the development of new liturgical practices for laity in both Buddhism and Daoism, gave ordinary people greater access to the gods.”¹⁰⁹ Mogao caves from this period can be understood as vernacular creations in a yet larger sense, however. Not only do they contain the trappings of vernacularized religious ritual, but the very caves in their pictorial program and style are uniquely local creations, a convergence of influences from widely divergent times and places.

CONCLUSION

Scholars repeatedly pose the question of what went on in these caves: what did people actually do in them? As my article has illustrated, the family shrines were configured around the very visible but immaterial liturgical ritual of expounding the Law 說法, modeled in this case on the contemporaneous sūtra lecture. Through their material donations the patrons constructed an “as-if” space.¹¹⁰ I would argue that few activities were ever held in the caves, because something else was already going on, namely an interaction with the Buddha within the familiar setting of the sūtra lecture. The primary function of the caves was in creating an ideal imagined world, an as-if world that condenses time and space. Here there is no need for a dharma master and a *dujiang*. In this ideal world the Buddha is continually present. Rather than the mediation of Dharma through Ananda and a dharma master, it is the Buddha who, thanks to the donors’ material gifts, can present the Law directly. As sacred spaces configured around enacting the Law, the caves present a kind of double as-if scenario: the initial ritual frame of the liturgy further inscribed into a simulacrum of the first frame.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Richard von Glahn, *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 2004), pp. 178–79.

¹¹⁰ For the discussion of ritual as adult play, see Robert Sharf, “Ritual,” in Donald Lopez, ed., *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* (Chicago: Chicago U.P., 2005), pp. 245–70. This understanding of ritual, as a mental act entailing the blending of apparently incongruous spaces and/or domains which results in a collapse of cause and effect (i.e., the ritual’s transformative nature), can also be analyzed through recent developments in cognitive science, particularly through the research program known as conceptual integration. See Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

¹¹¹ That is, the integration of the as-if ritual frame of the sūtra lecture (as-if by participat-

Therefore, to hold any kind of ritual in these caves would in fact be disruptive to such a doubly constructed space. To include “reality” would make it unreal.

This article began with a discussion of a fundamental shift in style and content during the mid-Tang period. Understanding caves from this period as being predicated on the sūtra lecture and its socio-religious implications provides a robust model for explaining both the dramatic change in the pictorial program that occurred and the visual and spatial elements that constitute that change. The inclusion of new, lifelike objects that were kinesthetically functional and appropriate to ritual underscores a shift in how the caves were conceptualized and used. Scholars, although positing theories about the actual use of these caves, have neglected to examine the objects depicted as functioning within a unified ground, meaningful to the donor. I argue that it is only through taking seriously the objects that occupy the donor’s perceptual and experiential fields that such a reconstruction is possible. Crucially, it necessary first to clarify what constitutes a meaningful object. Once delineated and properly contextualized, this specific material culture allows us to reestablish the social and religious topographies it sought to evoke. I have attempted to demonstrate that items unexplored in the study of Dunhuang art have the potential, when combined with texts and ritual, to elucidate not only the experienced world of those who had such caves constructed but also why the caves themselves may have changed. In tandem with the evolution of ritual and liturgical practices, the pictorial programs in caves from mid-Tang down to the beginning of the Xixia period underwent a type of vernacularization; by their immediacy, the caves speak the language of the living. Objects and their ritual uses, and thus the caves themselves, demonstrate a shift to the social and cultural topos of the lay donor. What is represented was the liturgical scene in its socio-religious importance, which permitted the extension of merit-making in perpetuity for donors, families, and their relations.

ing in this act the audience gains merit) with the as-if ritual frame of the *trompe l'oeil* material liturgical frame of the previous.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>DHBWJJZ</i>	Huang and Zhang, eds., <i>Dunhuang bianwen ji jiaozhu</i> 敦煌變文集校註
<i>DHMGK</i>	<i>Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku</i> 1–5 中國石窟敦煌莫高窟 (1–5)
<i>DHSKQJ</i>	<i>Dunhuang shiku quanji</i> 敦煌石窟全集
F	Institute of Oriental Studies Collection, St Petersburg
P.	Pelliot Collection
S.	Stein Collection
<i>T</i>	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經
<i>ZGMSQJ</i>	<i>Zhongguo meishu quanji</i> 中國美術全集